Computer active
ISSUE 709 | 7 – 20 MAY 2025
Learn something new in every issue

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FREE BUS TRAVEL? NOPE – IT'S A SCAM
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BEST NEW WINDOWS TOOL FOR YEARS!
We use it to make every PC task *FASTER* p60

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- ☑ Block on your network
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From the Editor

I don't think I'm especially rude (and anyone who disagrees can get stuffed). But I've learned over the years to instantly hang up on callers who introduce themselves with "Hello Daniel, how are you doing today?". It means one of two things: they want to sell me something I almost certainly don't want, or trick me into revealing that my password is 'pa$$w0rd' (it isn't by the way).

But these calls have dried up in the past few months. I've almost begun to miss them. It's clear the spam-blocking tools that for years were utterly useless have suddenly become effective. They work across all devices and services too, as Robert Irvine explains in his excellent Cover Feature, though you need to learn which settings to activate.

Robert does such a good job that he almost puts Daisy to shame. She's the AI pensioner O2 uses to confuse and frustrate scammers. If you want a chuckle, listen to her waffle on at www.snipca.com/54671.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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Price of the Samsung Galaxy A56, our new favourite phone – *p25*

5,000
How many books, CDs, DVDs and games Libib lets you catalogue – *p74*

20 million
Average number of videos uploaded to YouTube every day – *p7*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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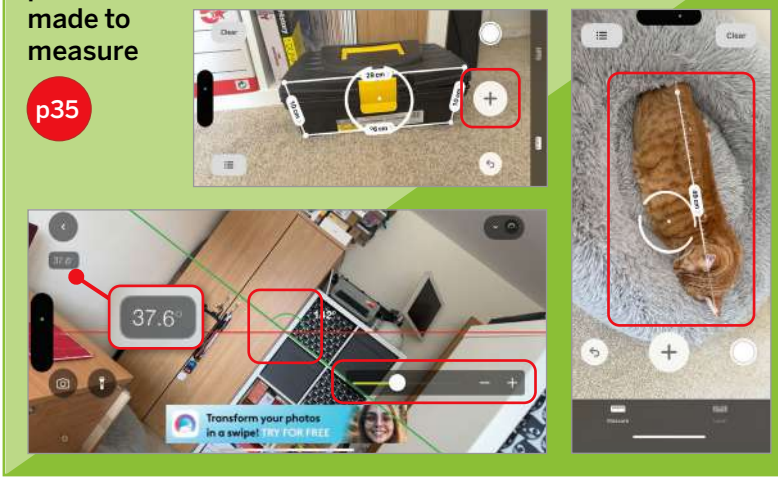

BLOCK ALL SPAM CALLS

COVER FEATURE P50

We've waited years for tools that actually work – and here they are!

- ☑ Block on Android phones
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- ☑ Block on your network
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- + Block spam messages too!

Has your 'new' device been used before?

p62

Second gear

Microsoft fixes Outlook bug that slows down computers

Microsoft will soon update the classic version of Outlook to fix a bug that uses too much of your computer's processing power, making it work slowly.

Users have complained about the problem on Microsoft's forums (www.snipca.com/54667) since last November.

Some said that typing in Outlook increased their processor (CPU) activity from one to up to 50 per cent – as measured by Task Manager.

Potential solutions such as disabling Outlook's add-ins or features like spellcheck didn't work. It appeared to affect Outlook in both Windows 10 and 11.

Microsoft acknowledged the problem in early April, confirming it affected version 2406 of Outlook (build 17726.20126), released in June 2024.

A few weeks later it said the Microsoft Word Team had fixed the bug and would release it in updates during May.

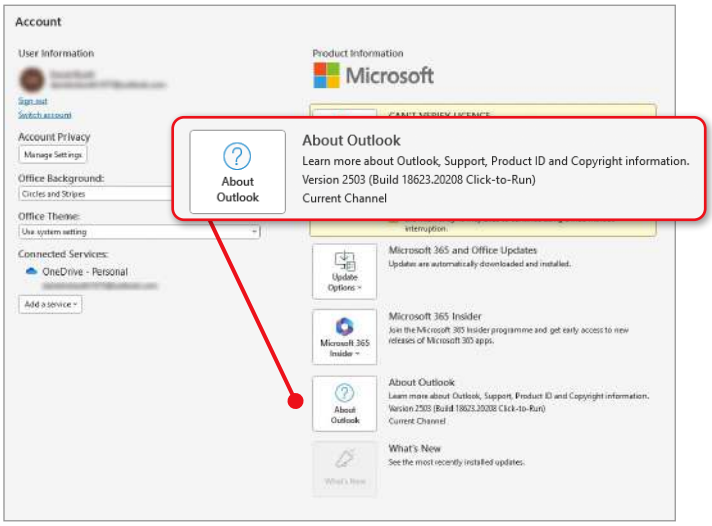
Which update you get depends on which update channel you use for Outlook. These channels determine how soon you get updates.

The earliest channel is Beta, and that will receive the fix in early May, updating Outlook to build 18822.15000.

The next channel is Current (Preview), which is more stable than Beta. It will receive the fix in mid-May, updating Outlook to build 18827.20000.

The final update, due in late May, is for the Current edition of Outlook, which is fully up to date and the tool most people use. Both Current editions will be updated to build 18827.20000, and all three versions will be updated to 2505.

To check which channel you're on, open Outlook then click File, Account, and look under Product Information. The version and build number will be listed next to About Outlook (see screenshot).



WHAT WE THINK

What a mess Microsoft has made of Outlook in the past few years. First it released a terrible new version that made many users want to stick with the classic (and better) edition. Then it broke the option that actually lets you switch back (see page 71). Microsoft says it'll support the classic version until "at least 2029" (www.snipca.com/50756), but it's acting like it can't wait to be rid of this pesky tool. This latest fix has taken too long to arrive – it must act faster next time.

Netflix adds dialogue-only subtitles to shows

Netflix is adding an option to see subtitles for dialogue only, removing audio descriptions such as 'phone ringing' and 'dramatic music plays'.

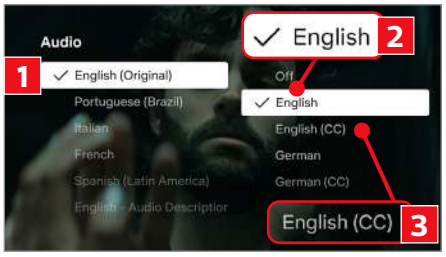
This reduces the amount of words on screen, showing only what's been spoken and nothing else.

To turn it on, first open the settings for subtitles. How you do this depends on the device you're watching Netflix on – see www.snipca.com/54669 for instructions.

Now choose 'English (Original)' (1 in our screenshot) followed by English 2. To keep audio descriptions choose 'English (CC)' 3.

At the moment it's available only on the fifth and final series of psychological thriller *You*, but Netflix says it will be eventually added to all its original shows, and in all languages it supports.

However, Netflix didn't say whether it will be added to shows and films it doesn't make, which is between 30 to 40 per cent of content available on the service. Read more at www.snipca.com/54662.



You'll like this...
The UK will be first European country to ban SIM farms (www.snipca.com/54670)

but not this...
Marks & Spencer has been hit by a major cyberattack (www.snipca.com/54660)

Roku's new small TV sticks won't block other ports

Roku has announced its smallest ever streaming sticks, and adds a voice-controlled remote to the cheapest model for the first time.

The new Roku Streaming Stick (£29.99) has HD streaming up to 1080p, while the Roku Streaming Stick Plus (£39.99) increases this to 4K (2160p).

These are the same resolutions as the two models they are replacing – the Roku Express and Roku Express 4K.

The cheaper of the new sticks has dual-band Wi-Fi 5 (802.11ac), while the Plus supports the more advanced Wi-Fi 6 (802.11ax), which is faster on busy networks and reaches further. Again, these are the same as the previous models.

The major difference in the new models is their size, which Roku claims are 35-per-cent smaller than rival sticks, such as the Amazon Fire TV Stick.

It means they should plug into your TV's HDMI port without blocking other ports (pictured) or having to rest on another surface.

Weighing just 26 grams each, Roku hopes the sticks will prove popular with holidaymakers this summer who want to take their TV services with them.

With the voice remote control, available on both models, you can play shows, launch streaming services and control volume.

Also for the first time, both sticks can be powered by your TV's USB port, so you shouldn't need another power cable hanging down.

Roku will continue to sell the Streaming Stick 4K, which adds Dolby Vision. It costs £39 from www.snipca.com/54651.

The sticks will be released in June. Visit Roku's site for more information: www.snipca.com/54649.

New YouTube design gets thumbs down

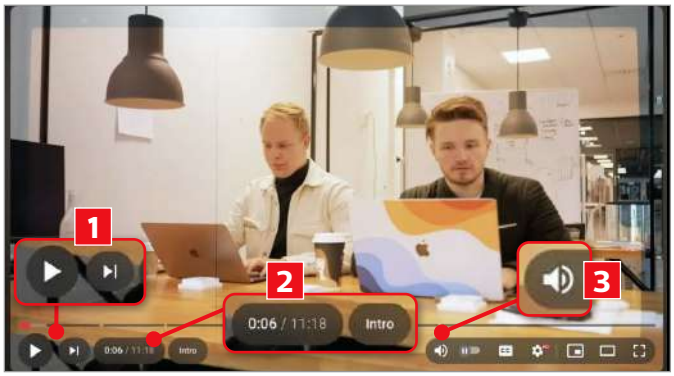
YouTube is rolling out a new design for watching videos on computers, as it marks 20 years since launch.

Some users on Reddit took screenshots of the new look, showing bigger play/pause and 'next' buttons (1 in our screenshot).

There are also buttons for the video's timestamp and chapters 2, while the volume button has been moved to the right 3.

Most Reddit users said they don't like the new design (www.snipca.com/54654), with some complaining that you can no longer change volume by hovering your cursor over it, or by using the arrow keys on your keyboard.

The new design is one of several changes coming to YouTube this summer, including Multiview for watching several non-sports videos at the same time.



Credit: D-Meme-D/Reddit

Also new are Ask Music, letting you build your own "personalised radio station" on the Android/iOS app, and 4x playback speed for Premium subscribers (see www.snipca.com/54644).

The first YouTube video was uploaded by co-founder Jawed Karim on 23 April 2005. It was an 18-second clip of Karim at San Diego Zoo (www.snipca.com/54656) and has been watched over 357 million times.

Over 20 million videos are now uploaded to YouTube every day.

IN BRIEF

CREATE AI VIDEOS USING ADOBE FIREFLY

Adobe has revamped its image-creating AI tool Firefly (www.snipca.com/54653) to generate faster and more accurate images. It also now lets you create images using AI models from other companies, including Google and OpenAI, while its video-generation tool is now out of beta. Firefly offers an unspecified number of free creations every day. To use more you need to pay from £9.98 a month. Read more at www.snipca.com/54652.

DON'T BUY THESE 'ENERGY-SAVING' PLUGS

Consumer group Which? has warned that illegal 'energy-saving' plugs are still being sold on Amazon, eBay and Temu despite being recalled by the Government in 2022. The devices falsely claim to cut your bills by "stabilising" voltage and "balancing" electric current. In reality they do nothing and often fail basic electrical safety standards. For details visit www.snipca.com/54658.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

This is Tiangong Ultra, the first robot to finish the Beijing half marathon in April. Twenty-one humanoid robots took part – alongside 12,000 *actual* humans – though only six finished, and none wore fancy dress. Its time was a decent two hours, 40 minutes – watch at www.snipca.com/54643.

IN BRIEF

VIRGIN MEDIA O2 AXES 3G IN FOUR MORE TOWNS

Virgin Media O2 has announced it will switch off its 3G network in Guildford, Norwich and Telford on 16 July, with Torquay following on 4 August. It follows a "successful" trial in the city of Durham in April. The company plans to switch off 3G across the whole of the UK by the end of 2025. Read more at www.snipca.com/54628.

NEARLY 60 CHROME ADD-ONS ARE MALWARE

Nearly 60 Chrome extensions have been detected that spy on your online activity. Most are 'hidden' extensions available as direct downloads from URLs rather than from the Chrome Web Store. They were discovered by US security firm Secure Annex, which said they had been downloaded by over 6 million people. Read more at www.snipca.com/54631 and see them listed on a spreadsheet at www.snipca.com/54630.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

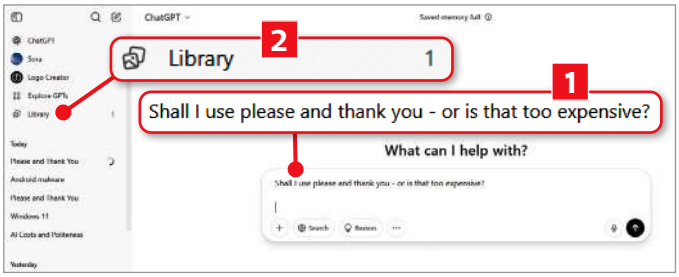
This is *Computeractive* editor Daniel Booth as ChatGPT sees him. It's proof we've fallen for the latest AI fad – creating self-portraits in the Japanese 'chibi' style of big heads, huge eyes and small bodies. Some people are even selling theirs for up to £50 online. Any takers?

Being nice to ChatGPT costs OpenAI "millions of dollars"

People saying please and thank you when using AI chatbot ChatGPT (1 in our screenshot) is costing OpenAI millions of dollars, says the company's boss.

Sam Altman was responding on X to the question: "I wonder how much money OpenAI has lost in electricity costs from people saying 'please' and 'thank you' to their models".

He replied: "Tens of millions of dollars well spent – you never know" (www.snipca.com/54637).



Altman's response was probably tongue in cheek, but it's still an indication of how expensive it is to run AI chatbots.

Each question asked requires vast computing power to process, so the longer the question, the more energy is needed. Some estimates put the cost at over $20m a month (about £15m).

Being polite to chatbots trains them to give you more helpful answers, some AI experts claim.

Kurtis Beavers, a design director for Microsoft Copilot, said using basic etiquette "not only ensures you get the same graciousness in return, but it also improves the AI's responsiveness and performance" (www.snipca.com/54638).

USE NEW & IMPROVED CHATGPT

ChatGPT has launched improved large language models (LLMs) for both its free and paid-for versions. The o4-mini LLM has replaced GPT-3.5 as the new free default, while o3 is new for paid-for accounts (read more at www.snipca.com/54639).

Both have been added automatically, without you needing to do anything. There's also a new Library of images ChatGPT has created for you (2 in our screenshot).

AI scammers use Quick Assist to access your PC

Microsoft has warned about a new type of tech-support scam where fraudsters use the Quick Assist tool to offer help.

Built into Windows, Quick Assist lets you connect remotely to another computer to give or receive help.

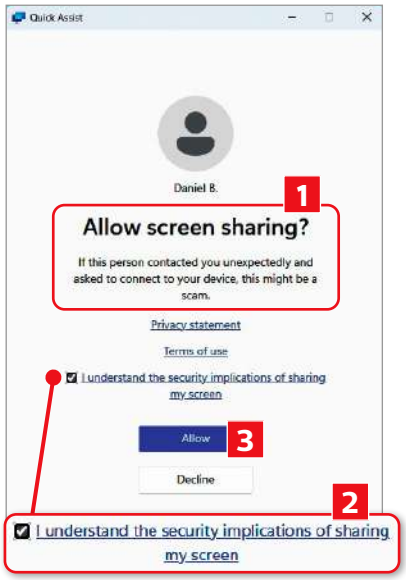
In the scam cybercriminals contact you by phone or email posing as support staff from a major tech company, such as Google or Microsoft.

They then persuade you to give them access via Quick Assist to fix what they claim is an urgent problem. But rather than helping you they install malware that gives them complete control over your computer.

It's thought to be the first time scammers are exploiting Quick Assist, having previously used third-party software like TeamViewer and AnyDesk.

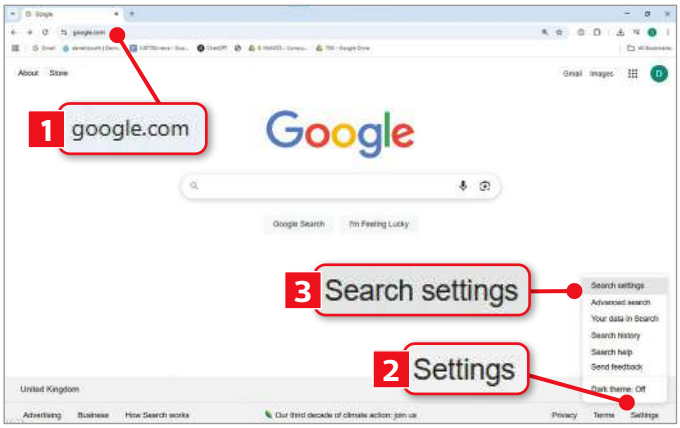
To combat the threat Microsoft will now show warnings when someone uses Quick Assist to connect to your computer (1 in our screenshot). You need to tick a box 2, then click Allow 3.

It's one of nine new scams identified by Microsoft in which criminals use AI (see www.snipca.com/54640).


Quick Assist
Daniel B.
1
Allow screen sharing?
If this person contacted you unexpectedly and asked to connect to your device, this might be a scam.
Privacy statement
Terms of use
I understand the security implications of sharing my screen
Allow
3
Decline
2
I understand the security implications of sharing my screen

It added that AI is "making it easier and cheaper to generate believable content for cyberattacks at an increasingly rapid rate".

Google to turn off .co.uk search address



Google is ditching all country-specific domain names for its search home page. It means if you type www.google.co.uk into your browser bar you'll soon be redirected to www.google.com (1 in our screenshot).

These web addresses are called country code top-level domain names (ccTLD). The change will apply for all country-specific codes from www.google.co.ac for Ascension Island to www.google.co.zw for Zimbabwe.

It follows Google's decision in 2017 to base your search results on your physical location, not the URL you typed. This meant if you typed www.google.co.uk in Australia, you'd get local results for Australia not the UK.

Google said this would produce results you'd be more interested in, but it frustrated many people who typed a country-specific URL to see results related to it. It forced users to dig into Google's settings to set a country for search results.

To do this, click Settings at the bottom right of www.google.com 2, then 'Search settings' 3 followed by 'Other settings' at the top right. Now click 'Language and region', select 'Results region', then choose a country and click Confirm.

Google says this "improvement" means country-specific domains are no longer needed. The change will "be rolled out gradually over the coming months", and as part of the process Google might ask you to log into your account and re-enter some of your search preferences.

The company added that "while this update will change what people see in their browser address bar, it won't affect the way Search works" (see www.snipca.com/54595).

Is Google still your favourite search engine? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Vodafone & Three 'planning to launch TV service'

Vodafone and Three are planning to launch a TV service following the approval in December of their £15bn merger.

Company sources told the *Telegraph* that the move would help the company attract more broadband customers, as it takes on market leader BT.

It's thought the service will offer live TV as well as streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

The merger, expected to be finalised by June, will create the UK's biggest mobile network, with around 27m customers.

However, combined it will have a broadband market share of only six per cent. Growing this is likely to require a TV service that keeps customers locked into a bundled package.

Vodafone refused to elaborate on the rumours, telling the *Telegraph* it's "too early to comment on the company's plans post-merger".

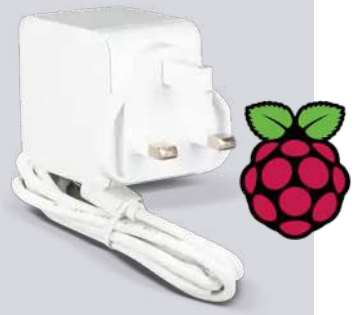
To secure merger approval the companies committed to investing £11 billion in 5G infrastructure over the next 10 years.

They will also have to cap some mobile prices for the next three years and keep offering fixed contracts to mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) so they're not squeezed out of the market.

IN BRIEF

BUY NEW RASPBERRY PI USB-C CHARGER

Raspberry Pi has released its own 45-watt USB-C charger (pictured below), priced $15 – about £11.20. It already sells 15.3W and 27W chargers, but said there was demand for a higher-powered model that could charge more devices. Read more at www.snipca.com/54592 and buy it from www.snipca.com/54591.



BT HIKES COST OF SOCIAL TARIFFS

BT has increased the price of its broadband deals for people on benefits (called social tariffs) by £1 a month. Its zero income plan goes up to £16, while Fibre Essentials rises to £21 and £24 for 36Mbps and 67Mbps respectively. The deals are also open to EE and Plusnet customers. Apply at www.snipca.com/54590.

FREELY ADDS 16 NEW TV CHANNELS

Freely is adding 16 new TV channels later this year, including *The Chase* and *Saturday Night, Every Night*, both of which are already available on ITVX. Three of the new channels come from Channel 4, including *4Homes*, and eight from Channel 5, including *The Yorkshire Vet*. See all the channels listed at www.snipca.com/54593.

Will Yahoo or OpenAI buy Google Chrome?

Only one could seriously snap up the world's biggest browser

Google might soon be forced to host the web's biggest ever jumble sale. The Department of Justice (DoJ) in the US thinks the tech giant has a monopoly in online search, and has ordered it to sell Chrome – and possibly other assets – to boost competition.

Chrome has a market share of around 67 per cent (and four billion users), with Apple's Safari way behind on 21 per cent. This helps Google drive users to its search engine, which accounts for almost 89 per cent of online searches, ahead of Microsoft's Bing, Russian search engine Yandex, Yahoo and DuckDuckGo.

THE FACTS

- Both OpenAI and Yahoo have expressed interest in buying Google Chrome
- It follows a ruling from the US Department of Justice to break up Google, claiming it has too much power in online search
- Google has appealed the ruling, insists Chrome isn't for sale and wants judges to throw out the case

> "OpenAI would have to do more than raid petty cash, but buying Chrome is easily affordable"

Potential buyers are circling. At a hearing in Washington DC Nick Turley, head of ChatGPT at OpenAI, said his company would be interested in buying Chrome. He added it would allow OpenAI to "offer a really incredible experience" and "introduce users to what an AI-first [browser] looks like".

But Turley also pointed out that "many other parties" would be keen to buy Chrome. This was demonstrated within 48 hours of his comments, as both Yahoo and AI search engine Perplexity expressed interest.

Brian Provost, Yahoo's Search General Manager, told the hearing that Yahoo had been developing a "prototype" browser since last summer, and that it would take another six to nine months to finish.

He added that Yahoo wants to build a browser because about 60 per cent of search queries come from them – often directly through the address bar. Launching their own browser would be one way for Yahoo to increase its search share, but Provost said buying Chrome would be much quicker.

Perplexity is also building a browser, called Comet, Chief Business Officer Dmitry Shevelenko told the hearing. The company's AI-powered search engine (www.perplexity.ai) has impressed many users (including us), and in April it launched a Windows program that gives you answers directly on your desktop.

Shevelenko said he thinks Perplexity could buy Chrome, though he expressed concerns about forcing Google to sell it to a rival AI firm that wouldn't develop it properly or keep it open source.

But despite Yahoo and Perplexity's interest, neither would be likely to afford Chrome. Estimates of the browser's value vary from $20bn to $50bn (£15bn to £37.5bn). Although Yahoo's parent company Apollo Asset Management doesn't publish its earnings, it's probably a fraction of Chrome's worth – and far from its $125bn peak back in 2000.

Perplexity has a brighter future than Yahoo, having raised $500m of funding in December to take its valuation to $9bn. But it would still be a stretch for the company to break the bank on Chrome.

That leaves OpenAI, which is on a different level with a valuation of $300bn. It would need to do more than raid petty cash, but buying Chrome is easily affordable. It's already rumoured to be building its own social-media network. Adding a browser to its fast-growing empire makes perfect sense.

But bosses at other tech giants will be thinking the same. Apple and Microsoft already have Edge and Safari, but Amazon and Meta (which owns Facebook) would love to get their hands on a browser, even if it is second-hand.

Of course, all this assumes Google will be forced to sell its browser. Its lawyers might still persuade judges that fears over its search dominance are unfounded. But if it fails, we'll see an almighty scramble to give Chrome a new home. And many will say it's not before time.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

‘Free bus travel’ Facebook scams

What’s the threat?

There’s been a rise in scammers advertising “smart cards” on Facebook that provide free bus travel for towns across the UK. They typically claim to be posted by a company that has the town in its name, and show photos of a local bus and the card itself.

One of the most recent scams is for an Arriva card providing six months of free bus travel (1 in our screenshot) in Darlington. It’s posted under the name ‘Darlington Public Transport’ 2 and claims it marks Arriva’s 90th anniversary 3. Arriva was founded in 1938 so will celebrate its 90th birthday soon, but the offer is fake.

Another recent scam promoted 500 bus cards for “unlimited travel” in Blackpool, while we’ve also seen adverts for Bedford, Brighton, Cambridge, Cardiff, Ipswich, Margate, Nottingham and Stoke.

The adverts have an email address, a Brazilian phone number and positive comments, often from French-sounding names. If you click the link to get the card, you’re taken to a survey where you’re asked to fill in your details.

How can you stay safe?

First, make a mental note that these scams aren’t likely to go away soon. As *The Northern Echo* reports (www.snipca.com/54577), they’ve been reported to Facebook but the company hasn’t removed them because they don’t break its advertising standards.

Arriva does sell smart cards (see www.snipca.com/54580) but has said it will never advertise them on social media, while Stagecoach has also warned about the scams (www.snipca.com/54573).

Darlington Public Transport's posts
Darlington Public Transport
Sponsored · Recently viewed ·
2
Free public transport for residents of Darlington and its surroundings!
In honor of its 90th anniversary, Arriva offers a limit... See more
3
In honor of its 90th anniversary, Arriva
6 MONTHS FREE
arriva
1

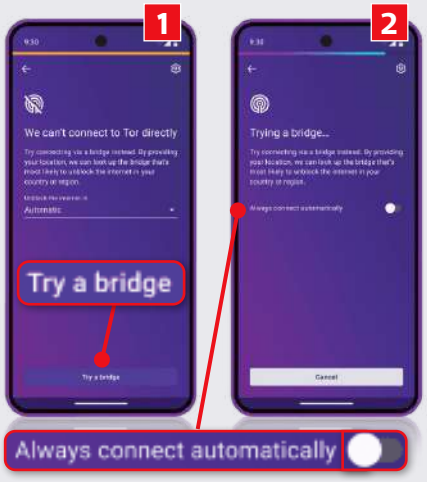
Credit The Northern Echo

New tools | Tor’s Connection Assist for Android

The Tor Browser is one of the most effective ways to access blocked websites, but Tor itself can be blocked by certain networks, firewalls or your internet provider. It tries to get around this by using hidden bridge relays that connect users to the Tor network, but even these can be blocked.

Tor aimed to fix this in 2022 by adding the feature Connection Assist, which automatically tries to find bridges. The tool worked straight away for Linux, macOS and Windows, and the new version 14.5 of Tor adds it to Android.

When it can’t connect directly it will tell you so, then ask you to tap ‘Try a bridge’ (see screenshot 1). Enable ‘Always connect automatically’ on the next screen 2 and it will always look for a bridge that is “most likely to unblock the internet in your country or region”.



For more information read Tor’s blog: www.snipca.com/54614. You can download the Tor app for Android phones and tablets from www.snipca.com/54616.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

Boots make up and sunscreen

In the past week I’ve seen two scams claiming to represent offers from Boots. The first on Facebook claimed that Boots offers “mystery boxes” containing leftover cosmetics worth £3. The post had a photo of a receipt from Boots that looked genuine. All you needed to do was complete a “quick 3-question survey”. As a 76-year-old bearded bloke, I was hardly going to be tempted, but my wife might’ve been. The other scam arrived in an email promoting a “Nivea sunscreen pack”. Again you’re asked to answer a survey. With summer almost here, I expect to see that email again.

David Greenidge

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Most Brits would support Government against Apple

Well done Apple and other privacy campaigners for forcing the legal case against the Government to be heard in public (Issue 708, page 7). I have no idea whether the Government's request to be given access to Apple's encrypted files is reasonable or justified, but it's significant enough to be open to public scrutiny.

The Government might even come to be thankful for the ruling because what's revealed in the case might actually support their position, especially if the scale of the threat posed to the public is revealed. I suspect most Brits would be prepared to sacrifice full encryption if it gave police more powers to tackle terrorism or child abusers.

Ray Dixon

ChatGPT couldn't help me with simple Excel task

I was as disturbed as Ralph Johnson when I read that ChatGPT accused a man of murdering his children (Star Letter, Issue 708). It's a moment to pause and ask whether we really want to be governed by AI in the future. I've found ChatGPT helpful when writing formal letters to my bank, solicitor and insurance companies. But it's still riddled with inaccuracies.

As an experiment I asked it how to perform a specific (but relatively simple) task in Excel. It gave me several steps that I followed and soon realised were wrong. I explined this to it, and it apologised and gave me more instructions. These too were wrong, and it apologised again. This happened several times. It only takes one negative experience like this to put you off trusting it as a reliable tool. It certainly has never given me instructions as

Advanced Data Protection
Apple can no longer offer Advanced Data Protection (ADP) in the United Kingdom to new users.
Advanced Data Protection
iCloud encrypts your data to keep it secure. Advanced Data Protection uses end-to-end

crystal-clear as you'll find in the pages of *Computeractive*!

Oliver Murray

Overhyped passkeys released before working properly

I don't blame Gordon Shackleton for giving up on passkeys (Letters, Issue 708). I've had similar mishaps, which have left me locked out of many of my accounts. Another problem with passkeys is how varied and inconsistent they are. Using them across different services feels unfamiliar.

This fails the key test when encouraging the public to adopt a new technology: it must work the same whatever service you're using. People just don't have the technical dexterity to cope, let alone the patience.

In my year of using passkeys I've noticed that logging into PayPal using a Windows passkey is different from logging into the site on my Apple iPhone. Why is this? It baffled me at first, and it still feels clunky. I've given up trying to use passkeys in my favourite browser Firefox because it's so erratic.

I've often read that the public weren't ready for passkeys, but this implies the public is somehow to blame for being slow on the uptake. I think it's truer to say that the tech industry wasn't ready for passkeys. They released them with much hype before checking they actually worked properly.

Jim Underwood

I'm leaving eBay because of its courier changes

I'm glad you highlighted eBay's decision to force sellers to use only approved couriers because I don't think it's had enough attention in the media (Issue 708, page 9). I retired during Covid and started to sell my vast collection of vintage postcards, cigarette cards and football programmes. I had over 10,000 items, and I've managed to sell almost half.

I've now got about 500 items for sale, and many of them will fetch over £10, meaning I'll have to use a courier. It's a kick in the teeth for loyal customers. I'll probably remove them and sell them at local fairs and markets instead. It's more sociable anyway, and will get me out of the house.

Brian Scott

What's the Issue...?

When did you explain how to use a mobile connection for your home network rather than broadband?

Joanna Fyson

CA SAYS In Issue 680, page 60.

I dimly recall a feature about a Microsoft phone app that sounded extremely useful. I think it was called something like Go or Start. Is that right?

James Sitton

CA SAYS It's called Start. See Issue 690, page 62.

I've just bought the Manhattan T4-R TV recorder. Didn't you mention it in a feature last year?

Bill Hughton

CA SAYS Yes, in Issue 693's 'Record and save TV shows' feature, page 62. Read it and the features above on our 2024 Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.

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Will Amazon dodge law on fake reviews?

The legislation banning fake reviews may be a small step in the right direction, but I doubt it will work (Issue 707, page 14) – just as having your number on the Telephone Preference Service (TPS, www.tpsonline.org.uk) fails dismally (see page 51). After 25 years on the TPS I still get a spam call most days. Legislation gives the appearance of the Government taking action, but it's only effective if it's actively and aggressively policed, with offenders penalised at a level that will make them stop.

Will businesses like Amazon be required to ensure their listings don't include fake reviews or do they have some kind of way around the legislation?

Some company reviews on Trustpilot are very suspicious, with almost half of them five-star ratings and half one star, with little in between. The negative reviews are often from people who have posted reviews before, usually to say the company is a scam. They all get the same standard response from the company. The positive ones are from people who'd never posted a review before. It's hard to know which are genuine.

William Roberts

CA SAYS We understand William's scepticism. Companies will always look for legal loopholes, and current schemes like the Telephone Preference Service aren't as effective as they should be. But the new law banning fake reviews is the strongest step yet. Crucially, it makes companies responsible for stopping fake reviews appearing on their site – even when they're posted by third-party sellers. That means Amazon can no longer shrug their shoulders and blame others.

The fines are now big enough to act as an incentive – up to 10 per cent of a company's global turnover, which in Amazon's case would be around $50bn (£37bn). But what will really focus minds is the £300,000 personal fines that company directors face if they're found to have played a role in breaching the rules. We won't know if the law has made a difference for some time, but we're optimistic.

Don't forget file size of doorbell videos

Issue 707's Cover Feature on video doorbells came at a very good time for me because I've just put in a bid for a new flat. Should I succeed, I'll be living elsewhere while repairs and redecoration are carried out. A video doorbell would allow me to respond to visitors and to speak to my builders.

However, there was one thing that your feature seemed to skirt around. It was good at telling us the amount of storage a device had or how much you had to pay to store it online, but gave no indication of how many files this storage would hold.

Some video files can be huge, depending on the format they're generated in, as I found with my Nextbase dashcam. After an accident the file was too large to be emailed to my insurers. The Eufy E340 doorbell (www.snipca.com/54301) that won your Gold Award may have 8GB of storage, but if each clip is several gigabytes you're going to run out of storage space in no time.

Edward Baines

CA SAYS Edward's right that video file sizes can vary significantly, depending on factors like resolution, frame rate and file-compression methods. Most video doorbells, including the Eufy E340, record in 2K resolution and use efficient compression formats like H.264 or H.265 to reduce file sizes.

The Eufy E340 stores its clips in short bursts, typically 20 to 30 seconds, and overwrites the oldest ones when the 8GB internal storage is full. Eufy says this is sufficient for up to 60 days of recordings, assuming an average of 30 videos per day, each lasting 20 seconds. This equates to approximately 1,800 clips, with each clip being around 2 to 4MB. However, this can vary based on activity levels. If you live on a busy street or receive frequent deliveries, the storage may fill up more quickly.

If you missed Issue 707's Cover Feature on video doorbells, you can buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/54582.

STAR LETTER

Why Windows 11's design is better than Windows 10

Issue 708's Cover Feature (pictured) gave some excellent reasons why Windows 11 is better than Windows 10. I upgraded a year ago to a custom-built Palicomp PC and the operating system runs smoothly on it. I use many of the tools and apps you mentioned.

PHONE THEFT
Computer active
WINDOWS 11
The 18 Things It Does Much Better Than Windows 10
SKYPE IS DEAD!
GENERATE CHATGPT AI IMAGES – FOR FREE!

But you didn't pay enough attention to how much better designed Windows 11 is. Without this, it wouldn't matter how useful the new tools are. Just think back to Windows 8.1. That could have had the best features the world had ever seen, but no one was ever going to use them because the design was so horrible.

You don't notice these design improvements at first, which is how it should be. The best design always makes a virtue of simplicity and doesn't want to be noticed. But after a while you start to appreciate the decluttered Start menu, the rounded corners on windows and the subtle transparent effects. You often hear people say that something is easy to use 'once you get the hang of it'. With Windows 11 there's nothing to get the hang of – it just works seamlessly!

You really appreciate these differences on a monitor with a high resolution. I recently spent a week working on a Windows 10 laptop and it felt distinctly old-fashioned by comparison. It wasn't bad as such, but it was like driving a Nineties Ford Escort after years enjoying the luxury of a Tesla.

I'm glad Windows 11's market share is about to overtake Windows 10. Hopefully, as more people use it word will spread that it's easier to use than its predecessor.

Martin Howard

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Can I refuse delivery of laptop that took ages to repair?

LEAD CASE

Q Last November, I bought an Honor MagicBook X 16 laptop (pictured). It became faulty in December and none of Honor's suggested fixes worked. I sent it back under warranty for a repair, but when it came back to me the screen was damaged. I asked for a replacement, which Honor refused. The company's now trying to return the original laptop after an alleged second repair. But I've since had to buy another laptop because it's taken so long. Can I refuse delivery?

Paul Vismeg

A Honor's level of service has been unacceptable, so we think Paul would be allowed to refuse delivery of the laptop. However, the situation is less clearcut than it would have been had he returned it under the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) rather than Honor's warranty. The CRA gives retailers one chance only to repair or replace a product, while warranties can give companies multiple attempts to fix a problem.

But we think Paul has a case against Honor because of how long it has taken to repair the laptop for a second time. The law doesn't give a specific timeline, but 30 days is usually considered sufficient – waiting four months certainly isn't. Even if the laptop eventually arrives repaired, Paul could argue he's been seriously inconvenienced, citing Section 24 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015.

If he does accept delivery, he can still reject the laptop for a full refund and Honor will have to pay to have it returned. We've asked Honor to accept that he has this right and requested it gives him a full refund. If Honor refuses, Paul may have to take the company to the small claims court.

CASE ONGOING

Can I cancel if Virgin won't speak to me?

Q I want to talk to Virgin Media about renewing my broadband, TV and landline subscription, but they won't talk to me because I don't have a mobile phone. Can I cancel without a fee because I've not been able to speak to them?

Jacki Fleming

A In theory yes, but we're confused as to why Virgin Media claims Jacki needs a mobile phone to talk to its customer team. You can get through to them by phoning 150 from a Virgin Media landline phone, or 0345 454 1111 from any other phone.

Legally, companies don't have to provide a contact number, but most companies do, particularly mobile and broadband providers. But what they *can't* do is insist customers use a mobile phone instead of a landline. If they did this and made it hard for you to renew, you'd be able to cancel without an early-termination fee.

We expect this case is a breakdown in communication, so we'll phone Virgin to check. If it has increased Jacki's fee in the meantime, we'll ask the company to give her the option of cancelling without paying a fee.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

MacKiev refunds reader for missing Family Tree Maker 24

We're happy to say that MacKiev has refunded John Axford after it failed to send him the 2024 upgrade of genealogy software Family Tree Maker (FTM) – see Issue 707. He had pre-ordered it last October for £39.95 and was told the final version would be ready by the end of 2024, but it still hasn't been released.

Other MacKiev customers haven't been so lucky. We've received several emails from readers who have been waiting over 12 months for FTM 2024. The company has missed many deadlines over the past year and there's still no firm news on when or even if it will be released.

Some readers have tried to get their money back through the payment platform FastSpring (https://fastspring.com), but MacKiev didn't give it authority to give refunds. Instead you should contact MacKiev directly through its support page (www.snipca.com/54557).

The company has some offices in the Ukraine capital of Kyiv, though its headquarters are in Boston, USA. Although it hasn't blamed the invasion by Russia for the delay to FTM, it seems likely to have had a major impact. We've asked the company to clarify the situation, because at the moment its website just says FTM 2024 is "arriving soon" (www.snipca.com/54556, pictured).

Do we have a case against abusive Evri driver?

Q We've brought a complaint against an Evri delivery driver who, shortly before Christmas, refused to wait for us to answer the door. My wife's in a wheelchair, but despite this the driver threw the parcel over the back fence, refused to pick it up, and proceeded to give her loads of abuse. This driver is now refusing to deliver to us, and is instead returning our parcels to the sender. My emails to Evri's CEO are being ignored. What should we do now?

Robert Pearce

A This is a nasty case, but Robert does have options. He can't seek a refund from Evri because he has no contract with the company. Instead, he should contact the sellers of the items to explain the problem. They won't be happy that their sales are being disrupted by a rogue delivery driver.

Next, he should fill in Evri's complaint form (www.snipca.com/54552). We'd like to think this wouldn't be ignored in the way his emails to the CEO have been.

It's a serious matter because Evri could find itself guilty of disability discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 (www.snipca.com/54553). We'll explain this to Evri, who may need to contact Robert in order to identify the driver.

CASE ONGOING

Can Argos refuse a return because I've opened the box?

Q I bought a Sony PS-LX310BT Bluetooth Record Player at Christmas. Because its speaker isn't very good I decided to buy a standalone Sonos Era 100 speaker (pictured) from the Argos website, but I couldn't connect it to the record player.

However, when I returned it to an Argos store the next day, I was refused a refund because I'd opened the box. Can that be right?

Alan Hodson

A No it's not. The Sonos Era 100 is compatible with Alan's record player, as confirmed by many articles explaining how to connect them. This suggests the speaker is faulty and therefore Alan is due a full refund.

He could also have sought a refund even if the speaker had connected to his record player. This is because customers are allowed to examine goods bought online and reject them within 14 days, faulty or not.

What you aren't allowed to do is actually *use* the goods. Argos might argue that connecting the speaker to a record player counts as using, but we think it's an acceptable examination. It would have a stronger case if Alan had used the speaker for a couple of days before deciding he no longer wanted it.

Thankfully, Alan managed to return the speaker at another Argos store, but we're going to talk to the company anyway to ask why different stores give different advice.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Currys' Swedish store fixed problem with UK printer

I moved to Sweden six years ago, and recently – while visiting my daughter in Carlisle, Cumbria – I bought an HP Smart Tank printer from Currys. However, when we unboxed it back home in Sweden a week later it wouldn't work.

I couldn't return to Carlisle to claim a refund, but discovered that Currys owns Elkjop Nordic AS (Norway), which in turn owns Elgiganten AB (Sweden). There's an Elgiganten store in Kalmar, some 35 miles from where I live.

I took the printer to the Elgiganten store in Kalmar, and was told there may be a charge for repair. Later I was told it may have to be returned to the original manufacturer for repair, again with a cost. Some time later I was told my repaired printer was ready to collect, but when I opened the box I saw that it was brand new! There was no fee to pay, and it works fantastically well.

Bernard Nicholson

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Currys

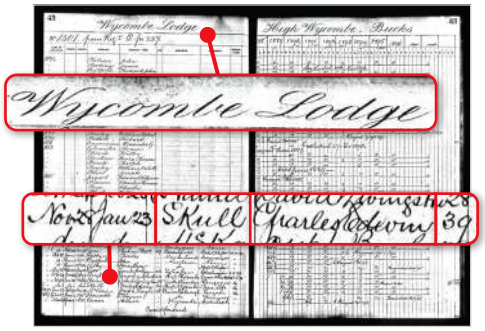
- **Online** www.snipca.com/54558
- **Phone** 0344 561 0000

Grow Your Family Tree

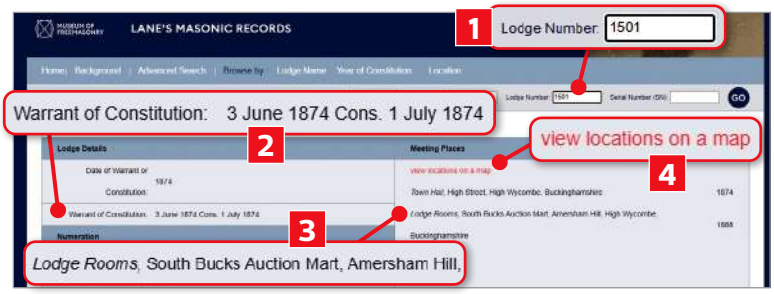
If your ancestor was a tradesman belonging to a masonic lodge, follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Search freemason membership registers

Freemasonry began in medieval times as part of the traditions of the stonemasons who built our great churches and cathedrals. They would use hand grips, signs and words to identify themselves as qualified tradesmen. There has been a Masonic Grand Lodge in England since 1717, which merged with a rival Grand Lodge to form the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813. Masonic lodges were required to return annual lists of members to the Grand Lodge from 1768. These returns were used to compile the membership registers described below. If you get stuck or want more resources visit the Museum of Freemasonry: www.snipca.com/54623.



Ancestry's freemasons records show that Charles Edwin Skull joined Wycombe Lodge in November 1889, aged 39



Search Lane's Masonic Records to find when lodges were constituted and their location

Browse Ancestry's lodge membership registers

Ancestry subscribers can search membership registers held by the Museum of Freemasonry (www.snipca.com/54621). Most are for lodges in England, though you'll also find some in Wales, Northern Ireland, Canada, Australia, India and South Africa. They tell you the member's number, date of joining, the lodge's location and how long they were a member – as well as personal details such as age, address and occupation. Ancestry also has records for Irish freemasons (1733-1923) at www.snipca.com/54622.

I searched for Charles Edwin Skull, who was a prominent chair manufacturer in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. The 1881 census tells us that Charles employed 50 people, some of whom may have been my ancestors. There were five search results for a 'Charles E.' or 'Charles Edwin Skull' – three for Wycombe Lodge (number 1501) and two for Sheraton Lodge (number 3019).

One entry said he joined Wycombe Lodge on 28 November 1889 aged 39 (see screenshot left). Subsequent registers for Wycombe Lodge record his membership up until 1921, when this collection stops. Another entry shows he joined Sheraton Lodge in London on 30 November 1903.

Search Lane's Masonic Records and freemason magazines

If you find your ancestor's lodge in Ancestry's registers, use its number to search Lane's Masonic Records (www.snipca.com/54625). Compiled by accountant John Lane in 1894, this was the first definitive list of English lodges from 1717 on. I searched for Wycombe Lodge (number 1501 – 1 in our screenshot above) and discovered it was constituted in 1874 2, initially meeting at Wycombe Town Hall and from 1888 at the Lodge Rooms on Amersham Hill 3. The page contains links to both on Google Maps 4.

Also try searching magazines aimed at freemasons at (https://masonicperiodicals.org). Click a publication and view PDFs, or click Advanced Search at the top right and type a search term, such as a name. I didn't locate Charles E Skull using his name as a keyword, but I did find references to his lodges by searching for 'Wycombe' and 'Sheraton'.

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I know one of my ancestors, named George Smith, was sent to Canada in the 1890s in the 'British Home Children' scheme. But that's all I know about him. It was probably a common name, but is there anyway of narrowing my search?

Liam Smith

You should try searching for him on Findmypast's 'Canada, Home Children Immigration Records Index, 1869-1930' set (www.snipca.com/54581), which is free. We found 106 George Smiths, 11 of which traveled to Canada in the 1890s. The records also show which children's home they came from (for example, Barnado's), the ship's name and the Canadian province it arrived at. This might give you enough info to find your ancestor.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search WW2 Prisoner of War cards

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

IMAGE EDITOR

Photo Variants 1.5

www.snipca.com/54636
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

When we recommended GIMP 3.0 (www.gimp.org) on this page in Issue 707, we warned that the image editor's many advanced tools can make it seem daunting. Photo Variants offers many of the same features but in a much friendlier interface that doesn't require you to read a manual to get started.

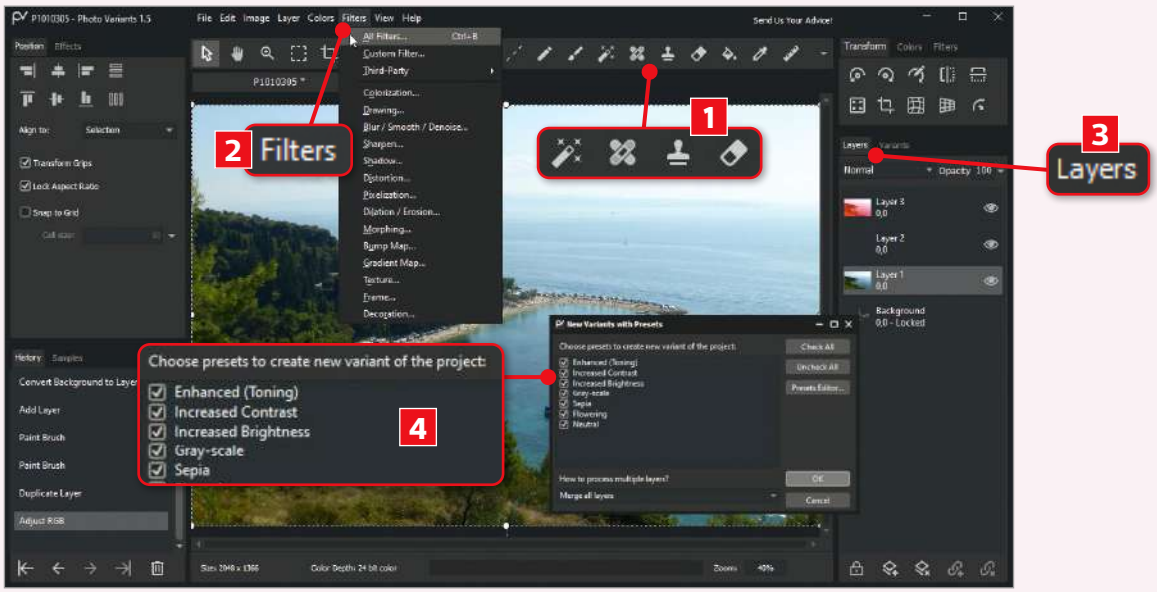
Quietly launched at the end of last year by a Canadian developer, then updated in April with new tools and filters, Photo Variants has clearly had a lot of thought put into its design. A toolbar across the top of the main window gives you easy access to essential editing options, while further tools are available in a panel on the right – all in logically organised menus.

Even working with layers, which can be confusing in many image editors, is straightforward and lets you experiment with different elements without affecting the original picture. Additionally, the Variants feature that gives the program its name applies presets such as Increased Contrast and 'Enhanced (Toning)' to your photos with a single click. You can then switch between them before deciding which variant to work with.

Some edits and enhancements are performed instantly to the current image, while others open a preview window, showing 'before' and 'after' versions. This lets you adjust the strength of the effect to get the precise result you want.

You can use tools such as Retouch, Heal and Clone to remove blemishes and other unwanted elements, and a variety of filters to transform your photos into works of art. Photo Variants helpfully records a history of all the edits you make, so you can revert to previous versions.

The program's biggest quirk is that it saves images in its own PVAR format, to preserve "all layers, variants and project settings". To save in a standard image format such as PNG, JPEG or TIF, choose 'Export As...' rather than 'Save As...' in the File menu.



1 The main toolbar gives you access to standard editing tools such as select, crop and text. You can also use various shapes and brushes, and remove imperfections and unwanted objects from photos using the Retouch, Heal and Clone tools.

2 Choose an option in the Filters menu and Photo Variants will open a preview window showing the original image and how it will look after applying the filter. Use the slider and other settings to adjust the filter, then click OK to apply and save.

3 Photo Variants makes working with layers more straightforward than programs like GIMP and Paint.NET. Use the Layers tab to add layers to an image, so you can experiment with different elements and adjust their opacity accordingly.

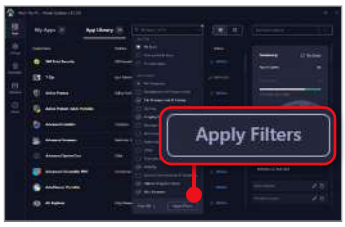
4 Click the 'Add Variants using Presets' button to choose which variants to apply to your photo. Options include Increased Brightness, Gray-scale and Sepia. These will be added to the Variants tab where you can try them with a single click.

SOFTWARE UPDATER

Patch My PC Home Updater 5.1.3

www.snipca.com/54620

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



This brilliant free software updater has been updated itself with several new features and improvements. The most notable is the addition of category filters to the My Apps and App Library tabs. Previously, you needed to scroll through long alphabetical lists to see which programs were installed on your PC and which were available to install from Patch My PC's catalogue of supported software. You can now simply apply the filters in the dropdown menu (see screenshot) to view only apps in specific categories. These include 'File Management & Backup', 'Imaging & Graphics' and 'Utilities & System Tools'. Patch My PC now lets you export a list of programs from one PC and import them on another for one-click installation – go to Settings, then 'Templates & Settings' to access these options. Also, the program detects installed software much faster than before.

VIDEO CONVERTER

Any Video Converter Free 9.1

www.snipca.com/54627

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11, or macOS

Our favourite free program for converting videos has added yet more handy options to its impressive arsenal of 'toolkits'. These toolkits go beyond video conversion to let you edit, record and download videos. Any Video Converter (AVC) Free 9.1 can quickly import entire video playlists from sites such as YouTube when you add their URLs and click Analyze. You can then download specific videos from the playlist at the quality level of your choice (see screenshot). It's also now possible to rename videos before you download them, if they've been mislabelled by the uploader. When converting videos, AVC now preserves their original timestamps, rather than replacing them with the current time and date. Sadly, the best new feature, which uses AI to identify scene changes in videos, is only available in AVC Ultimate, priced £45 a year.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Files Inspector Pro

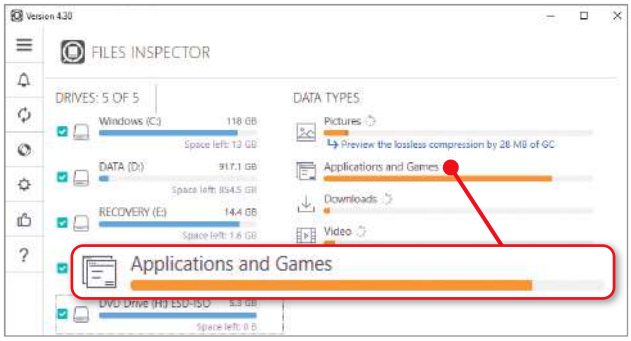
www.snipca.com/54635

Price: £12.60 **Free trial:** N/A

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

Files Inspector is like a cross between drive-space-analysis tools such as WizTree (www.snipca.com/53811) and the Storage manager in the Windows Settings app. It displays the current storage usage of each drive on your PC, including external and network drives, and reveals how much space is being consumed by different data types.

For example, click 'Applications and Games' (see screenshot) to list all the software installed on your PC and its size. You can sort the list to show the largest, newest or least-used items first, uninstall unwanted programs with a couple of clicks and remove leftover traces.



The Pictures, Video and Music options show you the biggest folders containing media files, and let you delete the biggest space hogs within them. The paid-for Pro version offers the useful option to compress images without losing quality, so you can reclaim storage without removing them. However, this only works with JPEG files.

Other Pro-only features include updating programs to the latest versions when available and tracing all changes software makes to your system during installation – so they can be easily reversed later. You can also use your licence to install Files Inspector Pro on two PCs, and get a year's worth of automatic updates and 'priority' technical support. On the downside, the program's calculations of file and folder sizes are quite slow, and its presentation of drive contents isn't that different from File Explorer.

OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

Files Inspector is a nice little program, but it doesn't offer much you won't find in better-known free tools. Although its Pro version has some handy extras and is reasonably priced, you get more comprehensive drive-space analysis from WizTree.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How do I make a searchable database?

Q I'm a member of my local museum, and I'm trying to help them move into the 21st century. They've been scanning and saving lots of photographs of local history but they've saved them in date order only. Some don't even have a file name. I need to organise them into a searchable database, with descriptive file names and perhaps some text I can attach to the file. What's the best way to index and edit all the scanned photos?

Alan Buxton

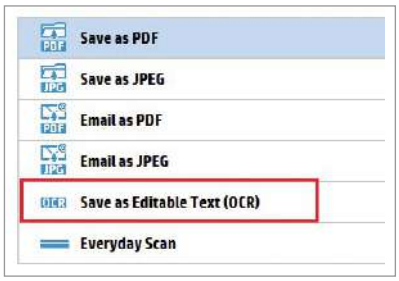
A It sounds like you need a photo-library management tool. We'd recommend Darktable, free from www.darktable.org. Once you've imported your photos, click the first one you want to index, and make sure 'lighttable' is selected at the top of the screen.

Next, click the triangle beside 'metadata editor' (1 in our screenshot) and you'll reveal fields for title, description, creator, publisher, rights and notes 2. These should be fairly self-explanatory, with the possible exception of the 'rights' field, which is where you note whether the museum owns the copyright to the picture, and what rights it – or anyone else – has to use it.

Below these metadata boxes you'll find a similar section for 'tagging' 3. Here you can type keywords related to your image to help anyone searching for it later. In our example below, we're editing a picture of the Jolly Sailor pub, which was a setting in the BBC Eighties drama series *Howards' Way*, filmed in Bursledon, Hampshire. So, we might add BBC, TV, pub and Hampshire as keywords. That would let us group it with any other photos in the collection that had been similarly tagged.

Is there an OCR program for my HP printer/scanner?

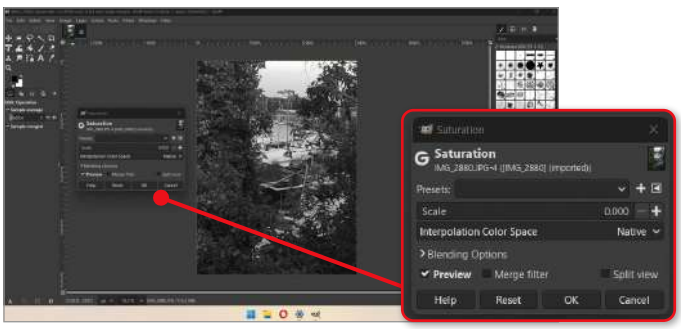
Q I recently lost access to a Canon scanner I was using, which had a useful optical character recognition (OCR) feature. Is there a free OCR program I can use with my HP LaserJet MFP M140 printer/scanner instead?



John Taylor

A Yes, you can use 'HP Scan for Windows' (www.snipca.com/54415). This won't have been included with your driver if it was released after June 2022. HP says to select 'Save as Editable Text (OCR)' – see screenshot above. You can save the results in Rich Text format or plain text.

Can I print from old copper plates?



Q I've got some copper plates showing local comic scenes made by my grandfather. The only copies I have are poor-quality photocopies of photocopies. Is there a tool that can print from a scan of the plates?

Sam Hinchliffe

A Yes, scan the plates then open the scan in GIMP (www.gimp.org). Convert the image to black and white by clicking Colors followed by Saturation, then drag the Scale slider to zero (see screenshot). Now invert it by selecting Invert from the Colors menu – in your scan, it's likely that the 'lighter' areas of the image will actually be darker because they are sunk into the plate and won't reflect the scanner's light so well. Now increase the contrast in the image so the light parts become lighter, and the dark areas darker.

Email us your questions at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Never search for 'Photo Recovery & File Recovery'

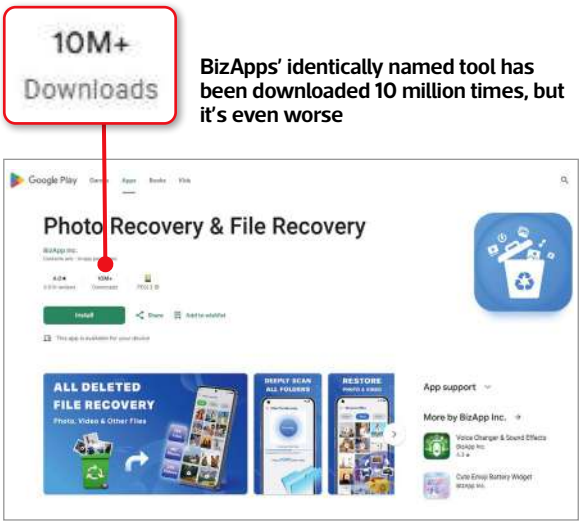
If you're looking for an app to recover lost photos, don't bother searching for one. I recently made the mistake of searching for 'photo recovery app' on the Google Play Store and came across 'Photo Recovery & File Recovery' (www.snipca.com/54619) by Bangladeshi developer PixelArmor . It was the 10th most popular free tool on the Play Store at the time of writing, which was odd considering it had been downloaded only 100,000 times and had no star rating.

I foolishly clicked Allow when it asked for permission to send notifications, and it proceeded to bug me every few minutes, urging me to recover files – even though I was already using the app! It even pestered me (1 in our screenshot above right) while I was taking a screenshot to show how many times it had notified me 2.

I deleted the app, but its popularity remained a mystery, so I searched online for answers. I actually found two other apps with exactly the same name, but made by different developers. The first – made by BizApp Inc (www.snipca.com/54611) – has been downloaded 10 million times (see screenshot above right) since launching in December, yet almost unbelievably it's even worse, with unskippable video adverts and a fake 'uninstall' button. The second – from Mega Utility Applications – launched in March and was available briefly before being removed. It looked just as awful.

You could try recovery apps from more reputable developers like EaseUS (www.snipca.com/54618), though they're not free. I've been burnt too often by these apps to bother. I'm just going to check regularly that Google is backing up my files, and stop searching for apps that never do what they claim.

Keumars was pestered by alerts and was then bugged again while taking this screenshot



BizApps' identically named tool has been downloaded 10 million times, but it's even worse

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

OpenAI on tackling risks of AI
www.snipca.com/54569

"We've streamlined levels to two clear thresholds that map to specific operational commitments: High capability, which could amplify existing pathways to severe harm, and Critical capability, which could introduce unprecedented new pathways to severe harm."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Let's hope AI doesn't lead us up the garden pathway, because we can't even work out how to describe the dangers.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Zak Coyne

In a parallel universe Zak Coyne would now be earning his first million as a tech entrepreneur, inspiring the next generation of whizz kids. Instead he's serving eight-and-a-half years in prison after admitting running the LabHost website, which sold malware kits to 2,000 criminals around the world.

Coyne, 24, from Huddersfield, managed the site between August 2021 and October 2023, describing it as a "one-stop shop for phishing" created "for spammers by spammers". Using his tools, scammers built fake sites that impersonated trusted brands such as banks, health companies and postal services. Around one million victims (70,000 in the UK) had their passwords and bank details hacked.

Met Police estimate around £100m was stolen before they worked with the National Crime Agency and Microsoft to take down the site in April 2024. Let's hope Coyne chooses a different career path when he's back on the streets.

Credit Met Police

PC | **£1,900** from CyberPowerPC www.snipca.com/54503

CyberPowerPC Infinity Z890 Air

Ahead of the game

Like the Wired2Fire HAL 9000 (£1,924 from www.snipca.com/54359) we reviewed in Issue 708, CyberPowerPC has chosen to fit its Infinity Z890 Air with an Nvidia GeForce RTX 5070 graphics card. If you're looking to play the latest games, such as Microsoft Flight Simulator, with high graphical detail settings, or get the best out of creative software, such as video editors, this is an excellent choice.

> "Lightning-quick graphics, top-quality components and an attractive case"

One difference between the two PCs is that the Infinity is built around one of the latest Intel processors, the Core Ultra 7 265KF, whereas the HAL 9000 has an AMD Ryzen 7 9700X. Both are decent modern processors and ensured similarly, high levels of performance in our benchmark tests.

The AMD chip was faster in single-core activities, so provides better performance in everyday tasks, though you're unlikely to get close to either PC's full potential when simply web browsing or running office software. The Infinity's Intel processor has more cores (20) and performed better in more demanding tests, though you need to be running resource-hungry software to get the benefit.

The Infinity really shines when playing games. We tested it with four current titles and pushed their graphical settings to the max. At 1080p resolution it flew, with an average frame rate of 197 frames per second (fps). It dropped to a still excellent 166fps at 2K resolution, and even managed 102fps at 4K, which is impressive. In a nutshell, the RTX 5070 does graphics work well.

CyberPowerPC has used quality components throughout this build, starting with the slick Lian Li Lancool 207 chassis. You won't even need a screwdriver to get into it – the tempered-glass pane and right-hand side panel both clip into place without screws and you simply slip your finger into a groove to remove them.

It's a small case (456x219x456mm – HxWxD), which is handy if space beneath your desk is an issue, but it does make it a bit cramped inside, particularly given the huge RTX 5070 graphics card (pictured below left). This, along with the cooling system, restricts easy access to the memory and storage, though with 32GB of RAM and 2TB of storage, you're unlikely to need an upgrade anytime soon. Should you want to boost performance in future you'll need to remove some components to access others, but it's more of a fiddle than a dealbreaker.

The internal fans did a great job of keeping everything cool without causing a racket. In general use you'll notice a gentle whirring noise. It occasionally rose in volume when running demanding tasks, but never became annoying.

The warranty lasts a generous five years. The first year includes collect and return, meaning CyberPowerPC will cover all courier costs, and the first two years includes parts as well as labour, so you'll have peace of mind in the medium term. If this is within your budget and you're looking for an Intel PC that can handle graphical tasks well, you should give the Infinity serious consideration.

SPECIFICATIONS

Twenty-core Intel Core Ultra 7 265KF processor • 32GB RAM • 2GB Nvidia GeForce RTX 5070 graphics card • 2TB SSD • Windows 11 Home • 456x219x456mm (HxWxD) • Five-year warranty
www.snipca.com/54503

VERDICT A PC with impressive specifications and high-quality components. Pricey, but well suited to both work and play

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Wired2Fire HAL 9000 £1,924 A desktop PC with similar credentials, but lags slightly in demanding

LAPTOP | **£999** from PCSpecialist www.snipca.com/54519

PCSpecialist 16 Fusion VI

Best of British

We review plenty of PCs that have been made overseas, so it's always good to see a British-built laptop for a change. The case and components of PCSpecialist's 16 Fusion VI model still come from abroad, but it's assembled in Wakefield. This is also where the tech support team is based, should you ever need it, and the laptop comes with an excellent three-year warranty.

Note, however, that parts are only covered for the first year and you'll have to cover the cost of sending the laptop back to PCSpecialist if something goes wrong after the first six months.

> "A classy design, superb screen and great at performing advanced AI tasks"

The chassis looks particularly classy, and we like the robust all-metal build. It accommodates plenty of connections – with two USB-C (including one that supports USB 4.0), one USB 3.2 and an HDMI socket on the left-hand side. The right edge has another USB 3.2 port, a microSD card slot and a headphone socket (all pictured below).

Inside, there's 16GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD to support the Intel Core Ultra 5 226V processor, which has an AI- powering specification of 40 TOPS. That's enough to push the Fusion into Microsoft's Copilot+ category, making this the first UK-built Copilot+ laptop we've tested.

The main benefit of this is the enhanced version of Windows 11 Home, which has a few extra tools you can use to create AI art and view live video captions. Because the Fusion has an Intel processor you don't get any of the software limitations we've seen with Qualcomm Snapdragon chips. In a nutshell, this will run any Windows software you care to throw at it.

It's not the niftiest 16in laptop we've seen recently. It's slower than the Asus Vivobook 16 Flip (£1,300 from www.snipca.com/54366, reviewed in Issue 708), which was also Intel-powered but used a more powerful Core Ultra 7 processor. This makes a noticeable difference to the performance, but it does keep the price of the Fusion below £1,000.

The 16in screen is excellent, almost perfectly tuned to the DCI-P3 standard, reproducing 94 per cent of its colours in our tests. It has a peak brightness level of 488cd/m², which is good enough for use in all lighting conditions.

In line with most laptops, the speakers are fairly so-so, and music starts to sound harsh if you push the volume up too much. The battery lasted over 15 hours in our performance tests, which should get you through a working day.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Intel Core Ultra 5 226V processor • 40 TOPS • 16GB RAM • Intel Arc 130V graphics • 16in 2560x1600-pixel IPS screen • 1TB SSD • 1x USB-C 4.0 port • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Home • 20x383x253mm (HxWxD) • 1.3kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/54519

LEFT EDGE

RIGHT EDGE

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A classy 16in laptop with a decent Intel processor, excellent screen, generous connectivity and a reasonable price tag

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Asus Vivobook 16 Flip £1,300
This flexible laptop is a similar size but offers better performance for £300 more

TABLET | **£379** from Currys www.snipca.com/54531

Lenovo Idea Tab Pro

Splitting sides

Lenovo's Idea Tab Pro is clearly aimed at anyone wavering between buying an iPad or Android tablet. That puts it in similar territory to the Honor Pad V9 (£400 from www.snipca.com/54419, reviewed in Issue 708), in that it exceeds the iPad's specifications in a number of key areas, while costing only a little more. In fact, the Idea Tab Pro adds only £50 to the iPad's £329. And that's despite its much larger 12.7in screen and bundled stylus – by comparison, Apple charges an extra £79 for its Pencil.

> "Its large screen and powerful speakers make it ideal for streaming music and TV"

The Idea Tab Pro doesn't move far from the standard tablet design, but has a smooth metal back (pictured below) that's both pleasant to the touch and feels like it'll last. The bezels around the screen are about 8mm, which are wider than we've seen on many rival tablets.

There's a magnetic area where the stylus can be stored when not in use, though it doesn't charge from the tablet – that's done via a USB-C port. Not that you'll need to do that regularly because the stylus has an impressive battery life of around 150 hours.

The Idea Tab Pro also includes a microSD card slot, which is ideal if you want to quickly expand your storage or transfer files from elsewhere. There's also a convenient fingerprint reader on its power button, which gave us safe, quick and reliable access during our tests.

The 12.7in screen uses IPS technology and has a resolution of 2944x1840 pixels. It's not quite as vibrant as a typical OLED screen, such as the one on our current favourite Android tablet, the Honor MagicPad2 (£449 from www.snipca.com/53150, see page 30).

That said, its colours are punchy and its 144Hz refresh rate feels slick when navigating Android. The maximum brightness level of 400cd/m² is reasonable. It's certainly more than enough for indoor use, but may struggle in the brightest sunlight if used outdoors.

The large screen is great for simple everyday usage, but particularly good for multi-tasking. Lenovo's version of Android has some extra tools for just this purpose, making it easy to split the screen between two apps or view one app as a floating window. This makes it ideal for viewing multiple documents at once or taking notes from a website.

Other additions to Android include the Entertainment Space on the home screen, which connects to most streaming services to provide a page of recommendations, which is a real help when pondering which films or TV shows to watch. Taken together with its surprisingly powerful speakers, it all makes the Idea Pad Pro an excellent choice for streaming music and videos.

The performance of its Mediatek Dimensity 8300 processor was also impressive. We put it through its paces with a range of demanding apps, plus plenty of multi-tab web browsing, and there was no noticeable slowdown.

Even games ran smoothly, with Call of Duty: Mobile maintaining more than 60 frames per second (fps) even after we cranked up the graphics settings to Very High. The more demanding game Zenless Zone Zero ran at a smooth 30fps on Low settings. Turning the frame rate up to 60fps, the Idea Tab Pro remained mostly stable, but did start to heat up.

Equipped with a large 10,200mAh battery, the Idea Tab Pro gets through an entire day of office work, web browsing and media streaming with some juice to spare, though gaming took more of a toll.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Mediatek Dimensity 8300 processor • 8GB RAM • 128GB storage • 12.7in 2944x1840-pixel IPS screen • 13-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Android 14 • 189x292x6.9mm (HxWxD) • 620g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54531

VERDICT Another decent Android tablet that offers a realistic alternative to the iPad, but we prefer the OLED screen of our current favourite (see below)

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Honor MagicPad2 £449 More expensive and the screen is smaller, but this has a brilliant OLED display that's worth the extra money

PHONE | **£499** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54585

Samsung Galaxy A56

Out of this world

The Google Pixel 7a (£279 from www.snipca.com/53388, reviewed in Issue 660) has been our favourite Android phone for some time now, but it's finally time for it to make way. Our new top dog is the Galaxy A56, which is the successor to Samsung's mid-range A55 model, which we reviewed in Issue 688.

To keep things simple, the A56 is only available with 8GB of RAM and 256GB of storage – all run by its Exynos 1580 processor. This impressive combination helps its performance nudge ahead of the Pixel 7a. In fact the A56 was faster in all our benchmark tests, whether it was navigating Android, handling everyday tasks such as email, or playing some casual games.

> "A vibrant screen, excellent camera and durable battery"

It has a 5,000mAh battery, which is a decent capacity for a phone at this price. In video-playback tests it lasted 29 hours, and got through a full day of typical use with charge to spare.

The screen is a thing of beauty, with vibrant colours, perfect contrast and smooth visuals – thanks to its 120Hz refresh rate. It benefits from AMOLED technology, measures 6.7in across the diagonal and has a resolution of 2340x1080 pixels. It can achieve a peak brightness of 1200cd/m², which is more than enough for even the sunniest of days. It's even protected by Corning Gorilla Glass Victus, adding protection against scratches and drops.

We were also impressed with Samsung's adaptation of Android 15 to its own One UI 7 system. This has a number of AI photo tools, including removal of objects, capturing the perfect group shot and suggestions for photo enhancements.

The A56 also has tools for translating foreign-language text and includes Google's handy 'Circle to Search' tool, which lets you search online for items you see in images. Samsung's Now Bar is just as useful, providing at-a-glance info on apps running in the background, such as music players and maps.

The camera is superb. The rear unit has a 50-megapixel main sensor, a 12-megapixel ultrawide lens, and a 5-megapixel macro lens. More megapixels don't always mean great photos, but Samsung has configured its cameras well. Shots look natural, detailed and well balanced. The camera even works well in lower light, and takes better night-time photos than we've seen on significantly more expensive phones.

SPECIFICATIONS
Eight-core Exynos 1580 processor • 8GB RAM • 256GB storage • 6.7in 2340x1080-pixel AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 12-megapixel ultrawide camera • 12-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.3 • One UI 7 interface • 162x78x7.4mm (HxWxD) • 198g • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/53782

VERDICT An eye-catching screen, superb camera and genuinely useful tools make this phone a must-have

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 9a £499 At the same price, Google's latest phone may be even better – find out next issue

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Multiple monitors

What do they do?

Connecting additional monitors to your PC can dramatically improve your productivity and is popular with creative professionals and office workers. It lets you keep your primary monitor or laptop screen for your main workload, then display your email and messaging apps, for example, on other screens, so you can keep an eye on them without getting distracted from your main task.

How do they work?

The easiest setup involves simply connecting a monitor to any available port on your laptop, desktop PC or mini PC. The other option is to 'daisy chain' monitors, whereby you link the first monitor to your PC, then connect a second monitor to the first, and so on. To do that, however, you have to make sure you have the correct ports.

What are the specs?

Connecting straight from a PC to monitor is straightforward as long as your monitor's inputs are compatible with the PC's outputs. You can also connect older monitors to newer PC ports using an adapter – for example, when connecting a monitor to an HDMI port on your PC. In a 'daisy chain' setup the monitor needs two DisplayPorts – one in and one out (pictured). The latter connects it to the next monitor in the chain. It also works with USB-C ports on laptops, but they need to be compatible with 'USB-C DisplayPort alternate mode' or Thunderbolt, such as the ports on the HP Series 7 Pro 24 inch WUXGA USB-C Monitor (£312 from www.snipca.com/54594).

Can I change it later?

As long as you have ports of the correct type, you can always add more monitors later.

PORTABLE STORAGE | **£30** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54559

PNY Elite-X Fit

A short drive

We sometimes refer to small USB storage drives as thumb drives, but this 256GB device (it also comes in 64GB and 128GB) is so tiny it might be better described as a fingernail drive. It has a USB-C connector, measures 27x15x5mm (HxWxD, when stood on one end), and weighs just 3g.

> "A tiny, robust USB-C drive for files you want to take anywhere"

It has a retractable cover, similar to PNY's Pro Elite V3 (£85 from www.snipca.com/53762, reviewed in Issue 704), but it's smaller thanks to its USB-C connector (the Elite V3 has a full-sized USB-A). Another difference is that – apart from its metal connector – the Elite-X Fit is made from plastic, whereas the V3 is metallic throughout.

To check how robust it is we carried it around attached to a keyring in our pocket for a couple of weeks, and even popped it in an envelope and posted it back to ourselves. It survived all this rough treatment, continuing to operate perfectly well afterwards.

It doesn't come with any software, such as backup or security tools. This is storage at its simplest, designed to hold and transfer documents, photos and more. It's particularly useful if you work on files that you'd like to access anywhere but don't want to keep in online storage, or for quickly transferring files from one device to another. Thanks to its USB-C connector, you can also use it with smartphones and tablets, not just PCs.

Despite its connector, the device is limited to USB 3.2 Gen 1 speeds, which is rated to max out at 200MB/s when reading and 100MB/s when writing. In our tests the Elite-X Fit performed well, exceeding the quoted read speed and peaking at 215MB/s, and coming close to the maximum write speeds at 99MB/s.

This certainly isn't the fastest USB storage you can buy – the V3, which uses USB 3.2 Gen 2, was much faster in our tests at 905MB/s (read) and 888MB/s (write) – but it's good enough for the size and the price.

SPECIFICATIONS

64GB, 128GB or 256GB capacities • USB-C connector • USB 3.2 Gen 1 performance • 27x15x5mm (HxWxD) • 30g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54559

VERDICT A tiny, affordable USB storage device, though it's slower and has less capacity than some

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Netac US9 1TB £75 A larger, faster and more versatile storage device, with both types of USB connector

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Can you suggest a budget monitor for editing photos?

Q I'd like to buy a new monitor because my current one is about eight years old and I'm pretty sure the colours aren't as vibrant as they used to be.

Having looked at a wide selection of new models during my research, I'm finding it difficult to choose from all the different specifications and prices.

I don't need it for gaming, but would use it to edit and organise my photos. My budget is limited.

David Wrigley

A For your photographic needs on a budget, we'd stick with our current favourite monitor, the Philips 27E1N1600AE (pictured, see page 32). It has a 27in screen, so there's plenty of room to display multiple photos, and costs just £202 from www.snipca.com/51687, which is excellent value for a monitor of this size and quality.

It can reproduce an impressive 82 per cent of the DCI-P3 standard, so you should be able get colours just right when editing your pictures. You can connect to it with a standard HDMI cable, though it also accepts video signals through its USB-C port.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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HEADPHONES | **£70** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54533

1More SonoFlow Pro HQ51

Keep the noise down

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★

This pair of over-ear headphones from Chinese manufacturer 1More sets out to do it all – high-quality audio, effective noise cancelling and an attractive design at a great price. They even throw in a decent battery life for good measure.

While it would be unrealistic to expect a pair of sub-£100 headphones to rival the audio quality of premium models aimed at audiophiles, these do a commendable job nonetheless. Sound is crystal clear and avoids tinniness, even at higher volumes. The default sound profile is fairly bass-heavy, but this can be adjusted in the 1More app's EQ settings if you prefer a lighter touch.

With noise-cancelling switched on we found the sound of chatter on public transport, the click of nearby keyboards and the noise of passing cars were significantly dampened, though not completely muted. Meanwhile, in our office, with the volume level set at 50 per cent, we barely heard anything except the music we were playing.

Noise-cancelling restricted the battery life to a still decent 65 hours. Switch it off and you'll easily get 100 hours. You can also plug the included cable into the 3.5mm audio if you want the reliability of a wired connection rather than Bluetooth.

These headphones are comfortable to wear, thanks to the generous padding on the headband and earcups. They also look attractive, particularly the sleek matt finish. The only real downside of the design are the control buttons, which feel a little plasticky, while the headband doesn't feel too sturdy – though a hard carry case is provided to protect them on your travels.

SPECIFICATIONS

40mm dynamic drivers • 65-hour battery life with noise-cancelling on; 100 hours with noise-cancelling off • Bluetooth 5.4 • 3.5mm audio jack • USB-C port for charging • USB-C and 3.5mm audio cable (with microphone) supplied • 246g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54533

VERDICT Affordable noise-cancelling headphones with surprisingly good audio and battery life

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Sony WH-CH520 £35 For quieter environments where noise cancelling isn't required, these are even cheaper

BLUETOOTH SPEAKER | **£130** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54534

Tribit StormBox Lava

Speaks volumes

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

Anyone looking for a larger Bluetooth speaker that can fill a room with music but still be easily transported for use outside will appreciate the versatility of the Tribit Stormbox Lava. It ticks both boxes without costing a fortune.

At 152x310x147mm (HxWxD) this semi-cylindrical speaker is too big to tuck into a small bag, but not so large that it's awkward to carry around. And to withstand the great outdoors it has a rugged build quality and ingress rating of IP67. This means it's protected against dust and dirt, and can survive being submerged in a metre of water for up to half an hour. For transportation you can switch between an interchangeable handle (pictured) and shoulder strap – both of which are supplied. It has an AUX port for wired listening and a USB-A port for charging external devices.

As you might expect at this price, sound quality isn't out of this world, but it's perfectly capable for house parties or outdoor events with lots of background noise. It handles most audio well – from deep bass tones to higher pitches, though sounds in the mid-range are often smothered by rumbling low-end frequencies and it loses a little quality at higher volumes.

If you don't like the default sound profile, you can adjust it in Tribit's phone app. Battery life is impressive – at 50-per-cent volume level it can play for 24 hours, which should be enough for even the most energetic party animal.

SPECIFICATIONS

2x 30W woofers • 2x 10W tweeters • 24-hour battery life • IP67 ingress protection • Bluetooth 5.4 • 152x310x147mm (HxWxD) • 2.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54534

VERDICT A versatile speaker for inside or outdoors, which sounds impressive for the price and has a battery that keeps going all day

★★★★½

ALTERNATIVE Pure Woodland £99 A less powerful speaker, but it comes with digital and FM radio built in as well as Bluetooth connectivity

EBOOK READER | **£280** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54612

Onyx Boox Palma 2

Phone book

This is Onyx's follow-up to the original Boox Palma (reviewed in Issue 672). It's a very similar proposition – namely an ebook reader with an E Ink Carta 1200 screen that's smaller than a typical e-reader. In fact at 159x80x8mm (HxDxW) it's closer in size to a smartphone, which makes it easy to carry around in a pocket and read with one hand.

Like many phones it has a 6.13in screen, mic, speakers, a camera on the back and buttons on the side. Unlike most smartphones, the plastic case feels relatively cheap and the battery lasts for weeks rather than hours.

> "Runs Android 13, so you can download apps as well as read ebooks"

The main physical difference between this and the previous Palma is that the power button is now longer and flatter. This is to incorporate a fingerprint scanner that's used to unlock the device – its predecessor used a passcode. From a design perspective this really is a minor upgrade.

The software improvements are definitely worthwhile, however. The redesigned app icons and settings for NeoReader (the Boox library app) give it a cleaner, more modern feel and make it easier to adjust fonts and page styling. It runs on an adapted version of Android 13 – another step up on the previous model, which used Android 11.

One of the best things about an Android-based ebook reader is that you can do a lot more with it than just read books. You can access the Google Play Store and download many of your favourite apps, including music-streaming services and mobile games. With its slower refresh rate, the E Ink screen is never going to be as slick as a typical smartphone display, but most apps remain surprisingly usable. If you want to stick to reading, both the Kindle and Kobo apps work well on the Palma 2.

The E Ink Carta 1200 screen is now previous-generation technology. While it's still fantastic to read on, with plenty of contrast to render text in sharp relief, the responsiveness isn't as good as newer Carta 1300 screens. The built-in speaker is perfectly fine for listening to audiobooks, but doesn't sound so great playing music. The Palma 2 comes with 128GB of storage and can accommodate a microSD card should you need more in future.

SPECIFICATIONS

6.13in 300ppi E Ink Carta 1200 touchscreen • 1648x824-pixel resolution • 128GB storage • Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 5.1 • USB-C charging port • 3950mAh Li-ion rechargeable battery • Android 13 • 159x80x8mm (HxDxW) • 170g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54612

VERDICT Decent pocket-sized alternative to Kindle and Kobo, but don't bother if you already have the previous version

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite £160 A cheaper option with a superior screen, but it won't fit in your pocket

DO I REALLY NEED...

A foldable ebook reader?

What is it?

Like Onyx's Boox Palma 2 (left) the Readmoo mooInk V Fold (pictured below, www.snipca.com/54633) is a pocket-sized ebook reader. However, this has a larger 8in screen that folds in half.

How does it work?

It's the first device to use a foldable version of E Ink's new Gallery 3 colour display. When open it's a similar size to an iPad mini, but folded up it's more like a smartphone.

What's the catch?

Chinese manufacturer Readmoo hasn't announced prices or launch dates yet. And it may soon have competition. E Ink already makes screens for all the popular brands of ebook reader, so manufacturers are probably already planning their own folding devices.

So can I do without it?

Yes. We think most people will still be happy to carry larger e-readers around with them.

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus Vivobook 16 Flip
£1,300 from www.snipca.com/54366
Tested Issue 708

Versatile device that can be used like a laptop or flipped over like a tablet. It's faster than the Dell Inspiron (below) with office software and web browsing, has a stunning screen, and lasts nearly 14 hours. Worth the money.

ALTERNATIVE Dell Inspiron 14 Plus Comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Great value. £799 from www.snipca.com/54634

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £675 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.9in
£329 from www.snipca.com/53977
Tested Issue 646

The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough that it's the best-value model. The link above takes you to Apple, but also check John Lewis where it's been as low as £309.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

Honor MagicPad2
£399 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £799 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £499 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

NEW ENTRY

Samsung Galaxy A56
£499 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £279 from www.snipca.com/53388.

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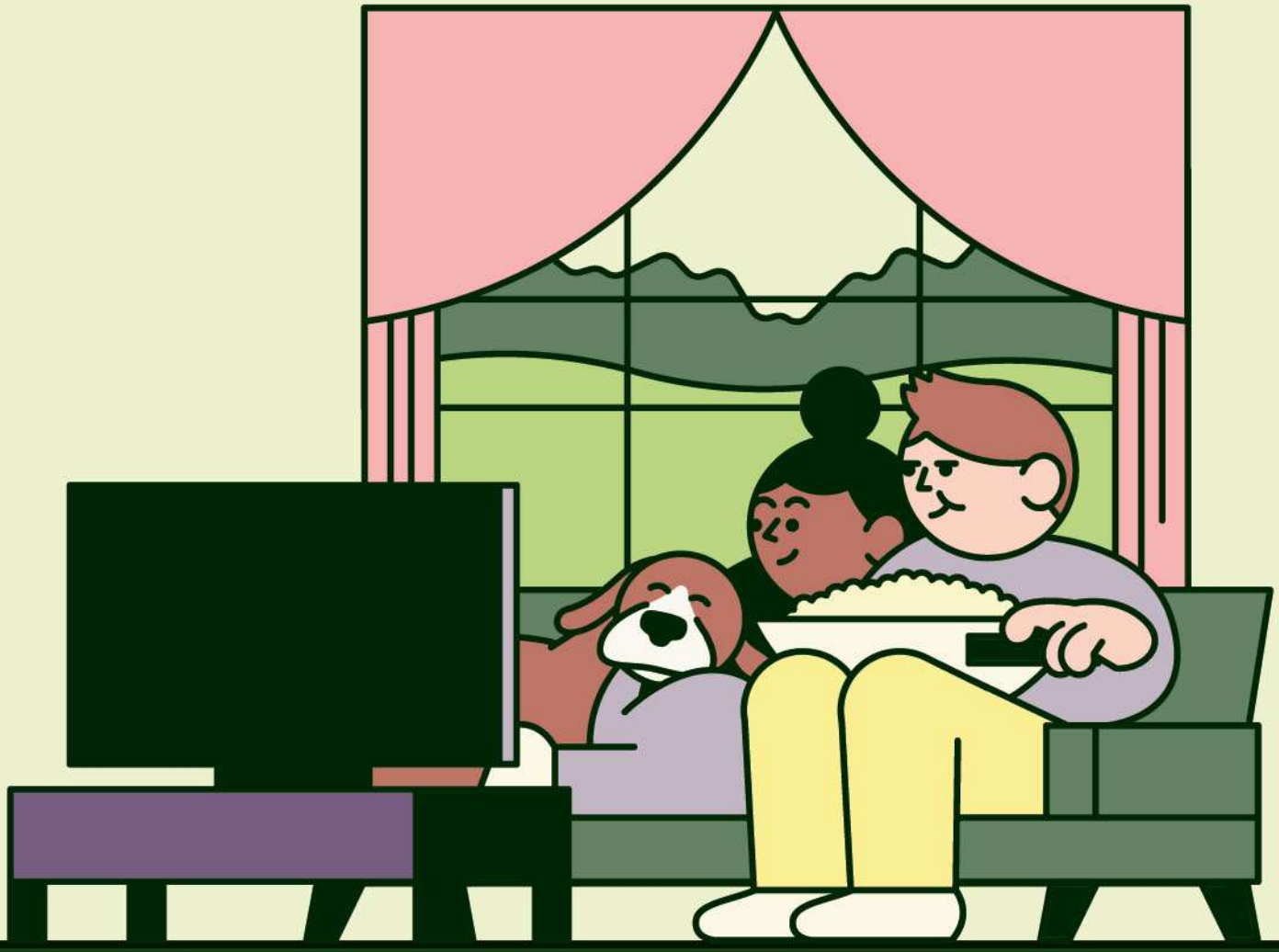

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £719 from www.snipca.com/51157

EBOOK READER

PRICE DROP

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£130 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£65 from www.snipca.com/50751
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£200 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£84 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £84; 2TB costs £143.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £65 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 8...

Majority Little Shelford Portable Bluetooth DAB+ radios

Majority's Little Shelford Portable Bluetooth DAB+ radio has a classic-looking, vintage design and can be powered both at the mains and by battery (four AA batteries). It has a carry handle and weighs just 760 grams, making it highly portable wherever you want to take it.

It has a backlit and dimmable LED screen showing station information and settings, while the 20-plus presets and dual alarm let you save your favourite radio stations and wake up to them every morning.

In this competition we're offering eight Cream radios, but it's also available in Midnight Blue, Black, Duck Egg, Red and Grey. It has a 3.5mm headphone jack and comes with a MicroUSB charging cable.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/54505 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 20 May. Good luck!

You can buy the **Little Shelford Portable Bluetooth DAB+ Radio** from Amazon priced £44.95 (www.snipca.com/54506). For more Majority products, including DVD players, microphones, speakers and turntables, visit www.majority.co.uk and 'like' www.facebook.com/MajorityAudio.

PRINTER

NEW ENTRY

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£181 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£199 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000
More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £360 from www.snipca.com/52110

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£180 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £215 from www.snipca.com/52051

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HOW TO...

Use your smartphone to help with DIY

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: iPhone or Android phone **Time required:** Probably a whole weekend

Spring is upon us, and now that we can throw open the windows to get rid of dust and fresh paint fumes, it's the perfect time to start thinking about home improvements. But have you got the right tools for the job? Take a trip to your local DIY store and, if you're not careful, you can end up spending hundreds of pounds on tape measures, wall-stud detectors, plumb lines and the wrong coloured paint (we've all done it). A cheaper alternative is to delegate some of these tasks to your phone.

With a camera, accelerometer and magnetometer, your phone is an all-in-one tradesperson's buddy, and a far more versatile DIY sidekick than you probably imagined. Here we'll reveal how your smartphone – whether Android or iPhone – can help you do a neater home-improvement job more quickly.

1 Measure distances and dimensions

If you have an iPhone or iPad, you can do away with a physical tape measure by using the built-in Measure app instead – as long as you don't need to be millimetre perfect (if you've uninstalled Measure, you can reinstall it from the App Store at www.snipca.com/54453). You'll need to be using an iPhone SE or later, iPhone 6s or later, an iPad Pro, or an iPad 5th Generation or later. And if you have an iPhone Pro, you'll also benefit from the built-in LiDAR scanner, which detects objects to automatically apply measurements.

When you launch the app, you'll see a broken circle on the screen. Line up the dot at the centre of this with one of the extremities of the object you want to measure and press the '+' (plus) button (see screenshot) to add a vector. Now move your iPhone or iPad to frame the opposite end of the dimension you want to measure and press the '+' button again.

Notice that your device will try and latch on to an obvious edge to make things easier. If it's not quite hitting the spot you're after, or it's latching on to something else very close to the object, try moving a little closer before pressing '+' at either end of the line.

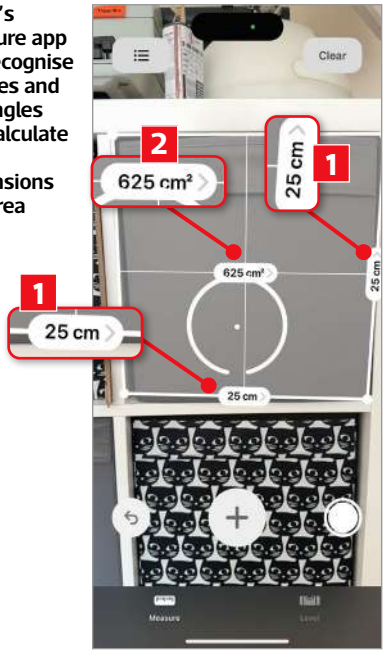
As soon as you've pressed '+' for the second time, it will show the distance between the two points on a line that links them. If you didn't quite manage to get one of the measurement points exactly positioned in the first place, you can now press and hold on either of them and move them to the correct location.

If you don't need millimetre accuracy, Apple's Measure app can replace your tape measure

Now that you've made your first measurement, you can add to it. Either repeat what you did to add a completely separate set of vectors, or position the point at the centre of the on-screen circle over one of the vectors at either end of your existing measurement.

You'll notice that it seems to snap on to the point you're pointing at. Press the '+' button again to confirm that you want to use this as the start of your new measurement, then frame the end point and press '+' again to complete the measurement. Press the on-screen shutter button to save a photo of the view, complete with the measurements you've just made overlaying it.

Rather neatly, if you want to measure a square or rectangle, you can skip the

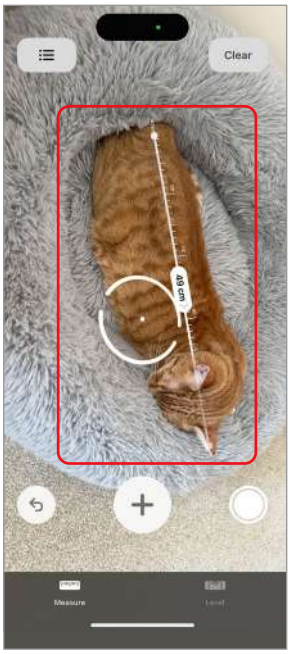


Apple's Measure app can recognise squares and rectangles and calculate their dimensions and area

process of adding multiple vectors. Instead, just take a step back so the whole object is within the Measure window and a dotted outline will be laid over it. Press '+' to confirm you want to measure it, and it will not only record the horizontal and vertical lengths (1 in our screenshot above), but also calculate the area 2.

If you have an iPad Pro 12.9in or later, iPad Pro 11in or later, iPhone 12 Pro or later, or iPhone 12 Pro Max or later, your device has a LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) scanner, which times how long it takes for light to bounce off an object to calculate measurements.

Notice how, if you have a LiDAR-enabled device, when you move the on-screen selector slightly away from the line you've just drawn, the line turns into a ruler. As it's a bit difficult to see this in a screenshot of a large item of furniture, we've measured our cat (pictured below left), so the ruler shows up against the ginger fur and you can more easily see what we mean. You can see how far from either end of the measurement specific features are located.



Using LiDAR, once you've marked out a measurement line, it turns into a ruler

You can't use Apple's Measure app on Android devices. Some have an equivalent app built in, but if yours doesn't try the ad-supported Smart Measure, which you can download from Google Play (www.snipca.com/54458). It performs a similar function, allowing you to set start and end points for measurements along a line.

2 Measure and set angles

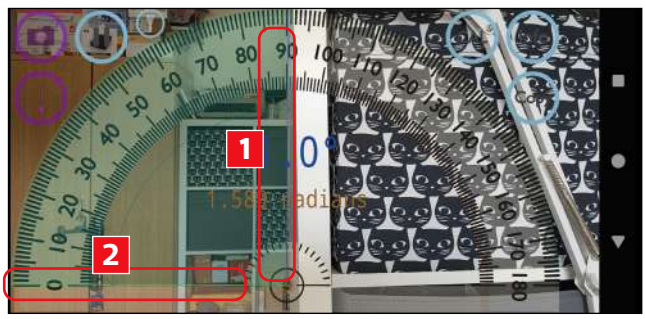
Not everything is set at a right angle, which can complicate matters when cutting items to fit. Fortunately, your phone can help, as its built-in accelerometer, which switches apps between portrait and landscape orientation when you turn the phone on its side, can also be used to measure angles between upright and horizontal.

With the free Protractor app for Android (www.snipca.com/54476) you can overlay an on-screen protractor on top of the view from your phone's camera. Tap the plumb line button, on the second row on the far left of the screen. This adds two new lines: a purple line showing a true vertical (1 in our screenshot below left) and a green line showing an accurate horizontal 2.

As you angle your phone left and right, these lines float in the opposite direction, so they always maintain their correct orientation. This lets you check that the vertical and horizontal surfaces you're pointing the camera at are accurate.

You can also use the app not just to check angles, but to set them. Hold and drag on the edge of the green area, and pull it to an angle indicated on the outer arc of the protractor. The specified angle will appear in the centre of the screen. Now line up a vertical or horizontal edge with either the zero marker or the edge of the green area that you've just dragged out, and use the opposite border to show where you need to position a surface, slice a section of wallpaper, paint along and more, in the physical world.

You can perform a similar function with the free (ad-supported) Angle Finder on iPhone (www.snipca.com/54482). This has several functions, including a metal detector, plumb line and gyroscope. In this instance, though, we're particularly interested in the laser level. Select it, then hold your phone so the camera is pointing at the angles you want to measure. Line up the red line



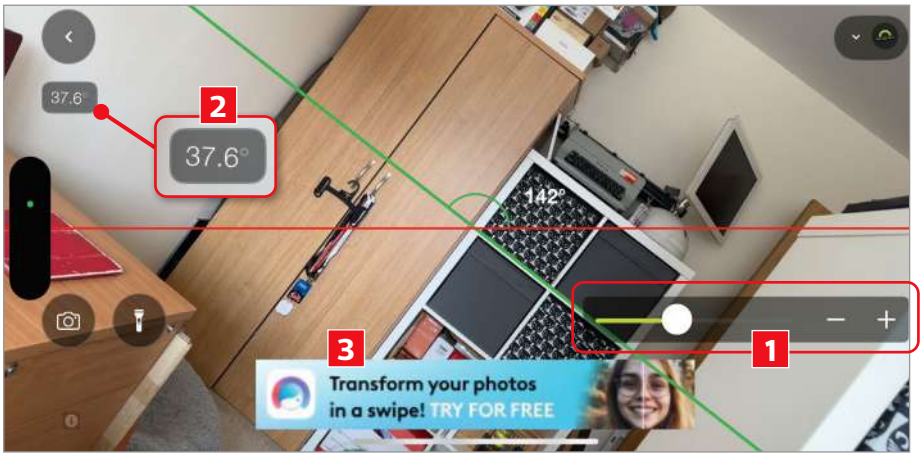
The Android Protractor app uses the camera to help you measure angles

How I use my phone for DIY

I tend to use my phone as a rough guide to complement traditional tools like tape measures and handheld stud detectors. However, I've used it to plan a new colour scheme for a bedroom using Dulux Visualiser. In the end I chose white paint, which I could probably have done without any help – though the app was still useful.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you use your phone for home-improvement projects? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk



The iPhone Angle Finder lets you emulate a laser level

The screen is green, so we know this picture frame is level

against one of the vertices, then use the bottom-right slider (1 in our screenshot above) to rotate the green line until it's aligned with your other edge. Now note the angle between them on the screen 2 (ignoring the advert below 3).

If you have an iPhone, your device also has a built-in spirit level, which you'll find if you return to the Measure app and tap Level. Hold your phone against the object you're trying to level off and gently change its orientation. When it's level, the display will turn from black to green (see screenshot top right).

3 See what your room would look like in different colours

One of the most time-consuming DIY jobs is painting a room – and unfortunately, you can be half way through the task before you realise you've made a dreadful mistake when choosing your colour. You can now avoid this calamity using augmented-reality apps like Dulux Visualiser, which show you what a colour would look like on your actual walls rather than just on a small paper strip. It's a free download for both Android and iOS (click the relevant button at the bottom of www.snipca.com/54459).

When you've installed the app, launch it, then tell it what kind of room you want to decorate (such as a bedroom, for example). Now, step into the room you want to paint and point your phone at the walls. Select a colour from the strip at the bottom of the screen and tap the walls you want to apply it to.

The room in our screenshot above right is actually painted white, but the Visualiser app has changed the wall colours without also affecting the white duvet and pillows (you can still see some of the original white paint through the bars of the bed head). Because the effect is applied live, we can move the phone around and, if we decide we don't like the chosen colour after all, we can select another one and it'll replace our original choice.

Dulux's Visualiser app lets you preview paint colours in your home

Stud Detector displays red lights when you pass your phone over a wall stud

4 Detect wall studs

Drilling into wall studs can damage your drill bit, and could hurt you if it dislodges or snaps off some metal. You should therefore always check whether there are any in the vicinity before you start working your way into walls. You can buy a wall- stud detector from a hardware store, but many phones can detect metal using a built-in magnetometer (which is more often used by the phone's compass app). If you're only going to use it once or twice it can be a cheaper solution, and save you adding yet another rarely used tool to your kit.

We tested Stud Finder on iPhone (www.snipca.com/54478) and Stud Detector on Android (www.snipca.com/54480). Both were free, with Stud Detector being ad supported, and Stud Finder pausing every so often for an alert that encouraged us to upgrade to the paid-for edition.

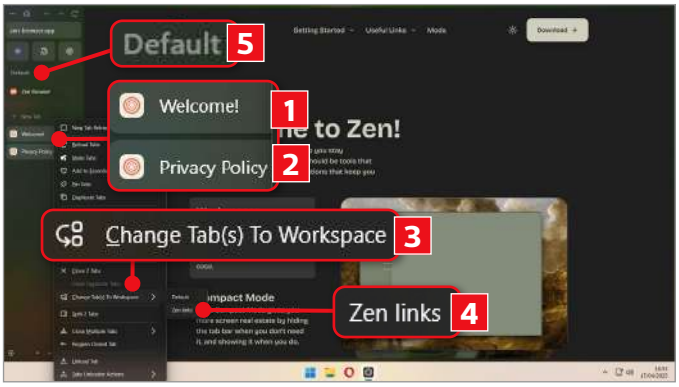
In each case, we ran them over an area where we knew there were studs in our walls, and both correctly detected them. If you have particularly thick walls each lets you increase the sensitivity (see screenshot above). Conversely, if you're getting false positives, you can reduce it.

Master your tabs with Zen Browser

What you need: Zen Browser
Time required: 30 minutes

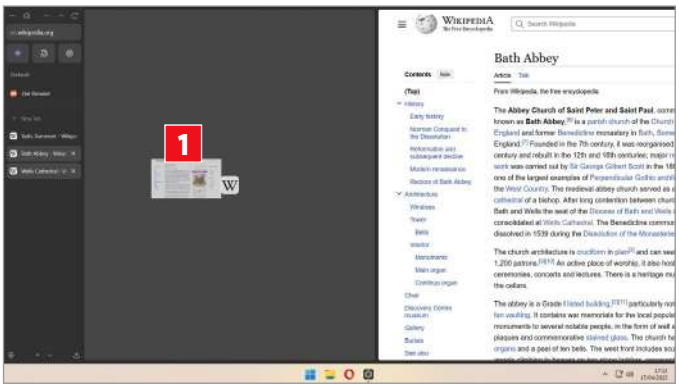
There are now so many browsers to choose from that newcomers to this crowded field need to do something special if they hope to compete with established names. Zen, which is based on the same technology as Firefox (rather than Chromium used by most other browsers), may just have cracked it, thanks to a series of clever improvements that should help you to more quickly navigate the web and manage your browser tabs. Although it's still in beta, you can download Zen Browser from www.snipca.com/54615. Click the Download button at the top right of the page, and follow the onscreen installation process. We didn't make any changes to the default options.

STEP 1 Start by getting familiar with Zen's most important elements, which are located in the left sidebar. These include the search and address box 1, bookmarks bar 2, tabs in the Default workspace 3 and active tabs 4. At the bottom you'll find icons for settings 5 and your downloads 6. Workspaces are where you organise related tabs. To create one, right-click Default 7 then click '+'. Give it a name (we're calling ours 'Zen links'), then click Create Workspace.

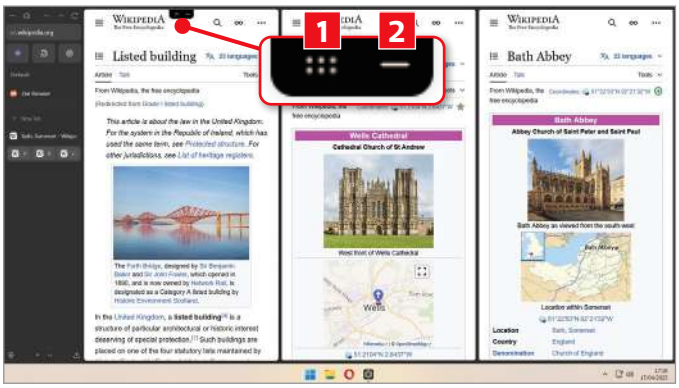


STEP 2 Zen will then create the new workspace and switch to it. Right-click the new ('Zen links') workspace in the sidebar and select Default to return to your previous view. Now click the Welcome tab 1 and hold down your Shift key while clicking the Privacy Policy tab 2 to select them both. Right-click either, then hover over Change Tab(s) To Workspace 3 and click 'Zen links' 4 on the menu that opens. Your tabs will disappear from the sidebar, but clicking Default 5 and selecting 'Zen links' will reveal them again. You can create other workspaces in the same way to house tabs you don't want to close, but would rather keep out of the way.

STEP 3 To save you navigating backwards and forwards through a series of pages that might not deliver what you want, Zen has a clever Glance feature. To use it, hold down the Alt key while clicking a link, and instead of opening the web page, Zen will show a preview of it. If it's not what you want, click close 1, but if you like the look of it, click the full-screen button 2 and it will open in a new tab.

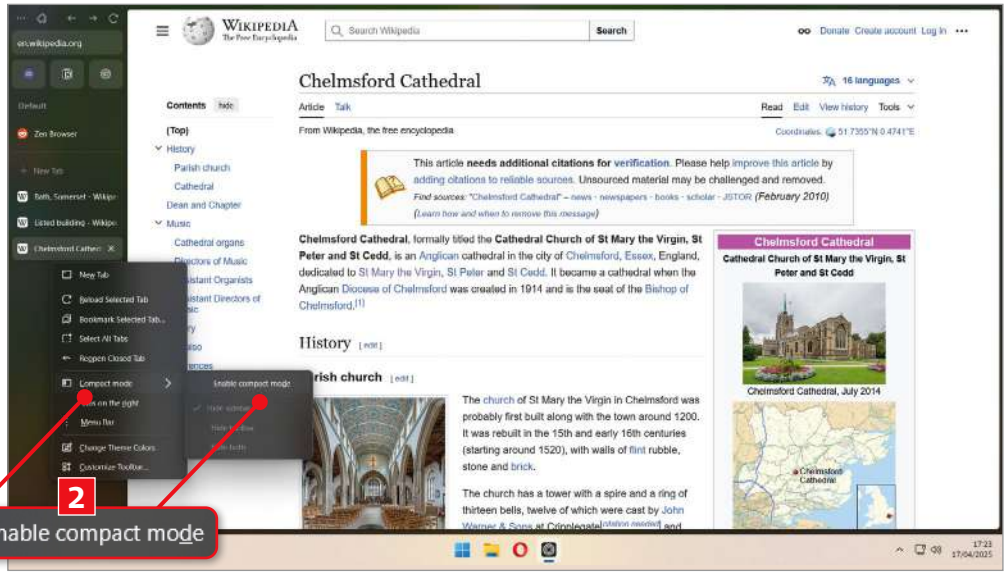


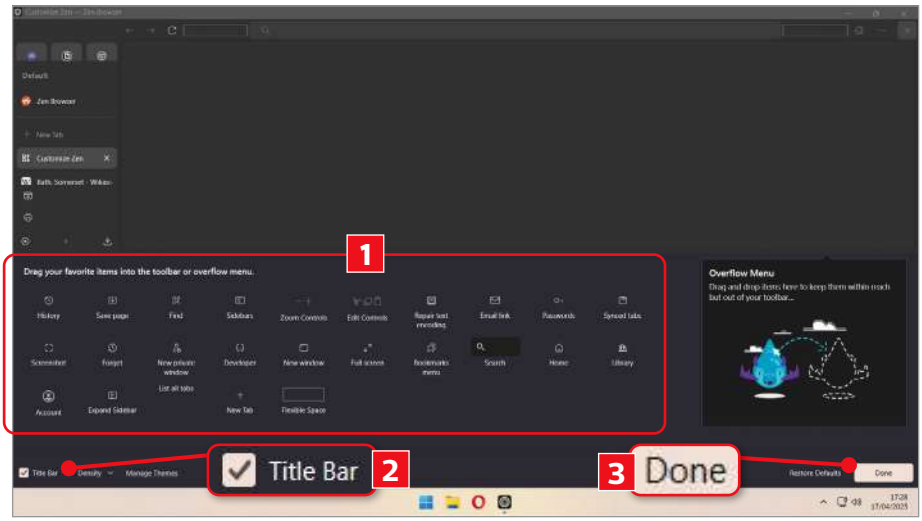
STEP 4 You'll have noticed a third button below the full-screen option in Step 3. This is the split-screen button, which opens the previewed page alongside the original page from which it was linked. You can display more pages by dragging them in from the sidebar – as we've done here 1. You can also right-click a link on any visible web page then click 'Split link to new tab' to open it alongside the page you're currently viewing.



STEP 5 When you have two or more pages open in a split view, hovering over one of them reveals a small tab containing a handle 1 and a '–' button 2. Click, hold and drag the handle to rearrange the layout of your panes. Click the '–' button to remove a pane from the split view. This doesn't close the page: it just removes it from the group, adding it to the sidebar as a new tab. To close it, hover over the tab in the sidebar and click the 'x' that appears.

STEP 6 In its default state, Zen hides the window controls to save space. Hover close to the top of the screen to reveal them. You can reclaim even more screen space by right-clicking the tab area, hovering over 'Compact mode' 1 and clicking 'Enable compact mode' 2. This hides the tab bar. To see your tabs again simply hover your cursor close to the left-hand edge of the screen and they will slide into view.





STEP 7 To make more extensive changes, right-click the tab area then click Customize Toolbar. This reveals a collection of useful controls 1 you can drag on to the toolbar for easy access. Tick the Title Bar box 2 and the window controls will be permanently returned to the top of the browser window, making it easier to minimise, resize or close the browser. Click Done 3 when you've finished making changes.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Set tasks for right and middle clicks in GIMP

Seven years is a long time to wait for a substantial update to GIMP (www.gimp.org), but version 3.0 seems to have been worth it (Issue 707, page 18). Digging into the settings, I've found a new way to change what happens when you click the right and middle buttons on your mouse.

Click Edit at the top then Preferences. Now click Canvas Interaction on the left followed by Modifiers (1 in our screenshot). Next, click where it says 'Click here to set a button's modifiers' 2 – making sure you click either the middle or right mouse button. Now click the dropdown menu and select what you want that button to do 3. I've set my middle button to display GIMP's menu and my right button to zoom. There are several other useful options, such as rotating and changing the brush size.

Laura Jennings

Laura wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433**

PHOTOGRAPHY

Use a tripod to take high-magnification photos

I take a lot of botanical pictures on my Android phone, using Hantorm's 'Magnifier & Microscope' app for my Android phone (www.snipca.com/54537). At higher magnifications it's difficult to hold my phone steady, so I bought the Lidasen Flexible Mini Tripod Holder (£8.99 from www.snipca.com/54538, pictured below). What a difference! This holder comes complete with a Bluetooth remote. The results have been amazing – see the attached picture of a leaf below. My wife has also commandeered my outfit for videoing her dog-training activities as well as group family pictures!

Chris Adam

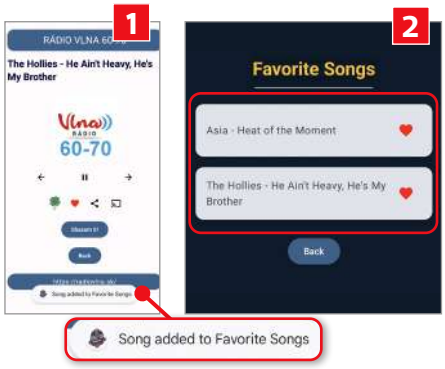
APPS

Double-tap songs to add to favourites

It doesn't have the best design, but I like Non Stop Radio (www.snipca.com/54016), which appeared in Issue 706's best new apps box (page 44). It's easy to add a station to your favourites (tap the heart icon), but I was flummoxed about how to add specific songs.

I only discovered how to do this by reading the Troubleshooting information, and it's actually quite simple: just double-tap the title of a song. This will be confirmed by a message at the bottom (see screenshot 1 above). Don't ask me how I found myself on a Slovakian radio station, but it was playing my favourite Hollies song, so I wasn't complaining. Tap 'Favorite Songs' and you'll see which songs you've added 2, though confusingly these have a heart icon next to them. Remember, you *don't* tap the heart icon to add specific songs.

Terry Charles



Why I stopped using...

ChatGPT, Claude and Google Gemini

The interfaces of these AI chatbots are pretty terrible, considering how good some of their large language models are. I'm also tired of how slow they can be.

And what I use instead...

I now use **T3 Chat** (https://t3.chat), which takes models from these chatbots and uses them in its own interface. The design is excellent and you immediately notice how much faster it is.

T3 Chat offers Gemini's flagship model and lite version and OpenAI's GPT-4o-mini for free. However, subscribing to the Pro plan (only $8 a month, which converts to £6) lets you use loads of models including DeepSeek (via a US third party, so no tracking) and Claude.

There's a dark mode you can turn on by clicking the top-right moon icon (see screenshot). It creates images based on your prompts and responds in real time. Mobile and desktop apps are coming soon.

Benjy Ross

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

Email us your tips: letters@computeractive.co.uk

SECURITY

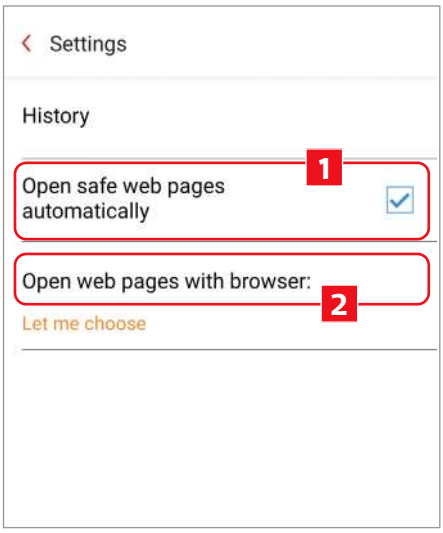
Make QR code scanner go straight to safe sites

I've been a satisfied Trend Micro customer for many years, so was eager to try its app for safely scanning QR codes (www.snipca.com/54027) as you recommended in Issue 706 (page 45). By default, when you scan a code you have to tap another button ('Open') to go to the website.

Presumably this is to make you think twice whether it's safe, but I find this redundant because I trust Trend Micro to block dodgy sites. And if it didn't, what would be the point of using its scanner anyway?

Trend Micro does let you skip this extra step, but you need to know where to look. Tap the top-right three-dot menu then tick 'Open safe web pages automatically' (1 in our screenshot below). Below this you'll see an option to change which browser web pages open in 2.

Len Hopgood



Reader recommends...

Panasonic 55Z90AEB Freely TV

£1,400 from www.snipca.com/54539

Living by the sea, with regular gales, our satellite dish got rusty over the years and eventually fell off during a storm. We were then restricted to channels via Wi-Fi (we can't get Freeview). We also needed a new TV.

Having done some research, we decided that a TV with Freely installed could be the answer – and the Panasonic 55Z90AEB suited our needs. It's not cheap, but it's well-designed and streamline, with just one cable (for power). It has a swivel stand, making viewing comfortable from a side angle. It has excellent colour and clarity. Nature programmes in particular look great in UHD.

Sound is good, though not as impressive as high-quality surround-sound. The remote control is easy to use, and Freely seems excellent. Talking to Alexa makes it easy to switch channels.

Linda Hawkins

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

AI

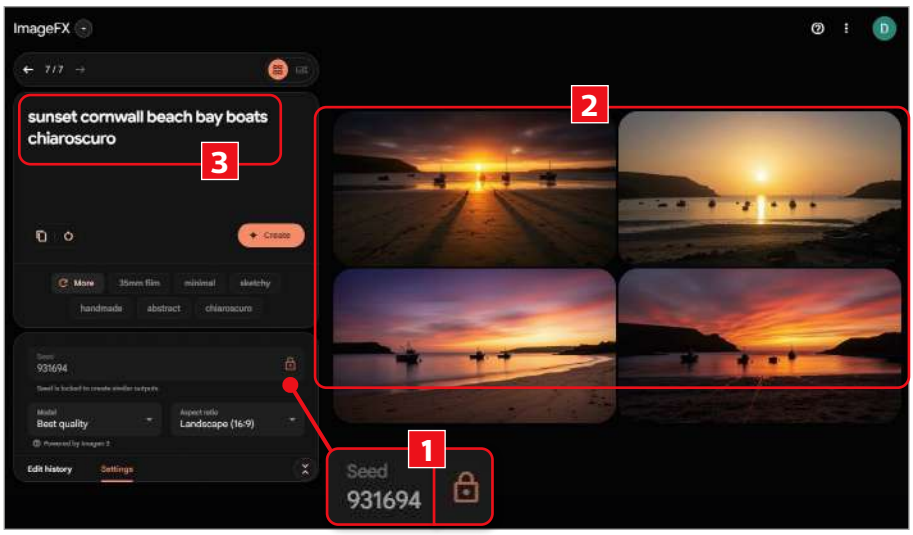
Lock ImageFX's 'Seed' to narrow your image choices

Like Philip Wilkinson (Readers' Tips, Issue 708), I've been using Google's ImageFX (www.snipca.com/54057) to create AI images. It's one of the best image creators I've come across. You still need to be patient and use trial and error to get an image you can work with, but this is made easier by locking and unlocking the 'Seed' option. This determines how varied the images are.

To explain, I begin with Seed unlocked. This produces images with great differences between them. I repeat this until I pick an image I like, then click the padlock to lock Seed (1 in our screenshot below left) and generate more images. This narrows the results to more similar images 2, making the trial-and-error process more focused.

This method has helped me create landscape backgrounds for images I need to manipulate. However, even with Seed locked, you must still use precise instructions, including colour, location, style, dimensions and more 3.

Derek Appleby



WINDOWS

Ditch Start menu for folder shortcuts

On many occasions over the years I've read readers moaning that they don't like the Start menu on Windows. This has always puzzled me because apart from accessing my computer's power button I can't remember the last time I actually used the Start menu. Instead I always use the two columns of shortcuts shown in my screenshot below.

If I don't have what I want on my desktop, I simply type it into the search box at the bottom.

Keith Norton

Browser Tips

CHROME

Add page-sharing options to your toolbar

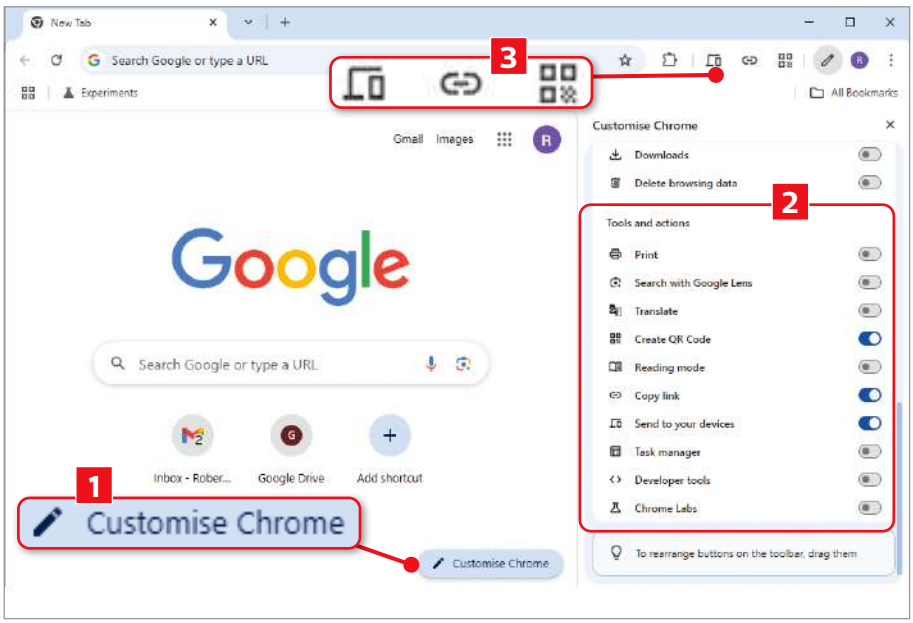
When Google redesigned Chrome in late 2023, it quietly removed the 'Share this page' button from the address bar. Clicking this button provided several ways to share the current web page, including copying its link, sending it to other devices on which you were signed into Chrome, and creating a QR code you could scan with your phone's camera.

These options were moved to the 'Cast, share and save' section of the browser's main menu, which is harder to access – in fact, you may not even know they are there. Thankfully, you can now restore these sharing options, either individually or in bulk, by adding buttons for them to Chrome's top-right toolbar.

To do so, click Customise Chrome in the bottom-right corner of a New Tab page (1 in our screenshot below) and select Toolbar. This will display a list of buttons you can add to the browser's toolbar – including a Downloads button, as we explained in Issue 708 (page 42).

Scroll down to the 'Tools and actions' section 2 and choose which buttons to add to the toolbar, such as 'Copy link', 'Send to your devices' and 'Create QR code'. The latter is particularly useful, because you can download and share the code, so anyone who scans it can open the relevant page.

The selected buttons will now appear on Chrome's toolbar 3. To remove them, either switch off their sliders or right-click their icons and select Unpin.



BRAVE

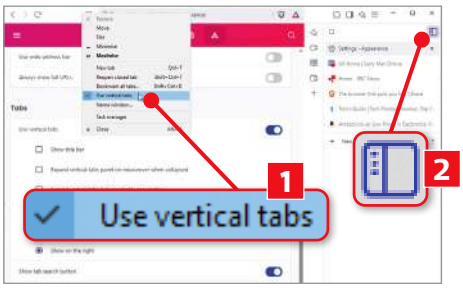
Switch to vertical tabs more easily

The latest version of Brave (1.77.95, released at the start of April), makes a small but welcome improvement to its vertical-tabs feature. This option moves your tabs from their traditional location across the top of the browser to a side panel on the right, where they're easier to access and have their full titles displayed.

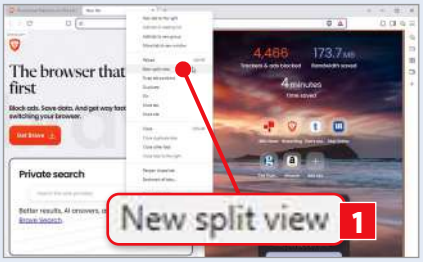
Previously, to switch to vertical tabs, you had to click Brave's three-line menu, choose Settings then Appearance, and switch on 'Use vertical tabs' in the Tabs section. Now you can simply right-click the tab bar and select 'Use vertical tabs' (1 in our screenshot below).

This will move your open tabs to a right-hand panel, where you can navigate them vertically. To switch back to horizontal tabs, right-click the panel and untick 'Use vertical tabs'.

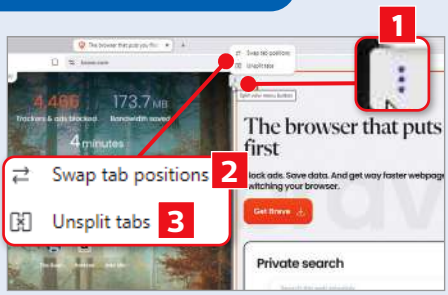
If you'd prefer the vertical-tabs panel to be on the left, go into Brave's Appearance settings and choose 'Show on the left' under 'Use vertical tabs'. You can shrink your vertical tabs to show only page favicons rather than their titles, by clicking the 'Minimise tabs' button in the top-right corner of the side panel 2.



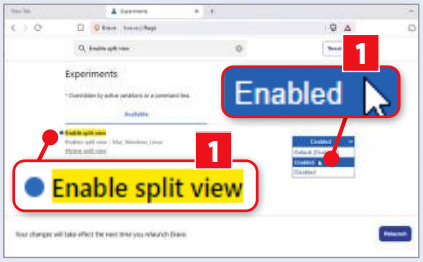
WORKSHOP View two web pages side-by-side in Brave



1 Right-click a tab in Brave's tab bar and select 'New split view' 1. This will split the main browser window into two parts, with the current tab displayed on the left. If you only have one tab open, the right half of the window will show a New Tab page.



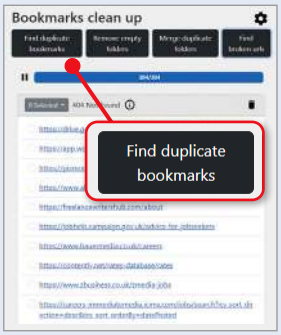
2 To swap the two halves, click the 'Split view menu button' positioned between them at the top of the window 1 and choose 'Swap tab positions' 2. Select 'Unsplit tabs' 3 to close the opposite tab and make the current one fill the whole window.



3 If you don't see the 'New split view' option when you right-click a tab, type brave://flags in the browser's address bar and press Enter. Find the entry Enable split view 1, select Enabled in its dropdown menu 2 and relaunch Brave.

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Cleaning up your bookmarks

Bookmarks clean up
Chromium
www.snipca.com/54497
Firefox
www.snipca.com/54498



Whether you save bookmarks in one long list or organised into folders, it's useful to give them a spring clean to remove obsolete entries. This extension makes that task easier by scanning your bookmarks for broken URLs and letting you delete them individually.

It can also find and remove duplicate bookmarks (see screenshot) and empty folders, to keep your collection as tidy as possible. Click the Settings button top right to exclude specific folders from its scans.

Sensibly, 'Bookmarks clean up' advises you to back up your bookmarks before you delete them, and provides instructions. Its developer also explains why it requires certain permissions to check your bookmarks.

If you don't like that, try...

Bookmark Dupes
Chromium
www.snipca.com/54500
This extension also removes duplicate bookmarks and empty folders, but not links that no longer work.

Brave has also introduced a 'split view', which lets you browse two web pages side-by-side. See our Workshop below left to learn how it works.

FIREFOX

Organise your tabs into themed groups

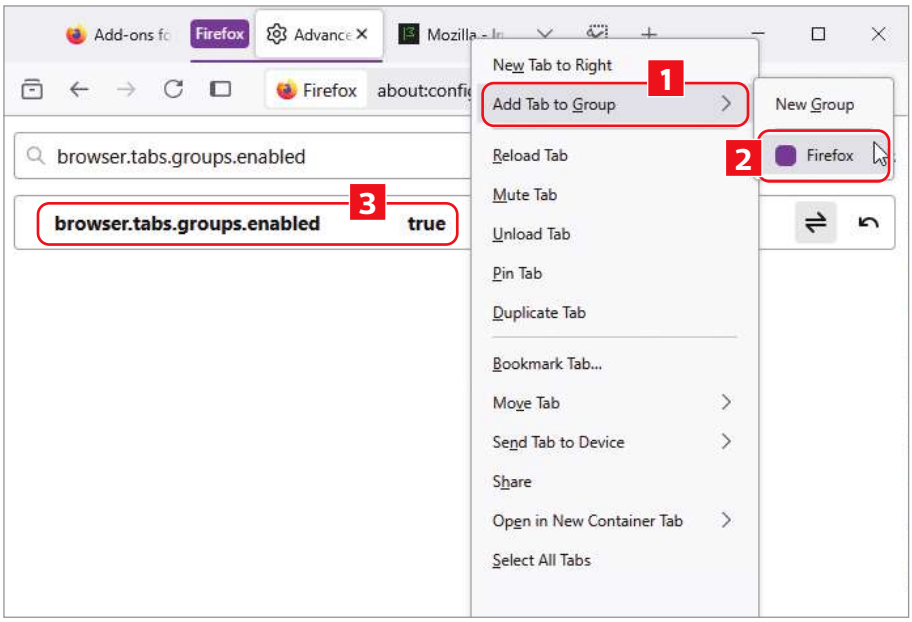
Firefox 137, released in early April, finally introduced the long-awaited 'Tab groups' feature. As we explained in Issue 699 (page 42), this lets you organise your tabs into themed groups, to make them easier to find and to prevent your tab bar from becoming cluttered.

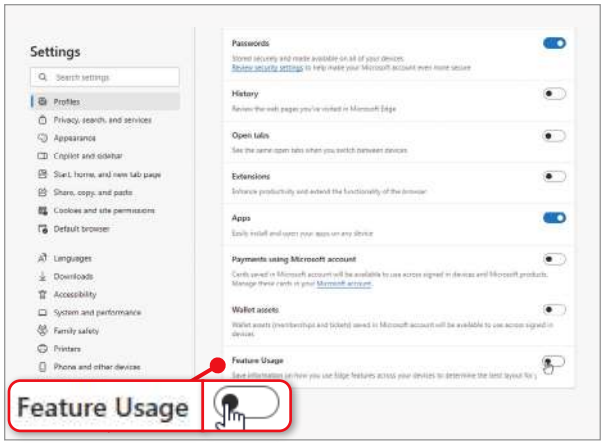
To use the new option, right-click a tab and select 'Add Tab to New Group'. Give the tab group a suitable name and assign it a colour, then click Done. You can now add further tabs to the group by right-clicking them and choosing 'Add Tab to Group' (1 in our screenshot below) then the name of the group 2.

Alternatively, select New Group to create a new tab group with a different theme, name and colour. Closing a group will retain all the tabs you added to it, so you can reopen them all in one go by clicking its coloured label.

If you don't see the 'Add Tab to New Group' option when you right-click a Firefox tab, you may not have received it yet as part of Mozilla's 'progressive rollout'.

To enable it yourself, type about://config in the address bar, press Enter and click 'Accept the Risk and Continue'. Search for the preference browser.tabs.groups.enabled and double-click it to change its value from 'false' to 'true' 3.





EDGE

Sync your 'feature usage' across devices (or don't)

Microsoft has updated the Sync tool in Edge to sync your 'feature usage' across other devices on which you're signed into the browser. This rather baffling option saves information about how you use various Edge features, so the browser's layout can adjust accordingly.

If you'd prefer not to sync your feature usage, because it entails sharing data with Microsoft, you can switch off the option, which is enabled by default in Edge 135 (released in April). Click the three-dot menu top right of the browser and choose Settings, then Profiles. Select 'Sync' and switch off the Feature Usage option at the bottom of the Sync list (see screenshot above).

If you don't see this, then it hasn't rolled out to your version of Edge, so you needn't worry. You can also stop syncing other data, including your History, open tabs and extensions.

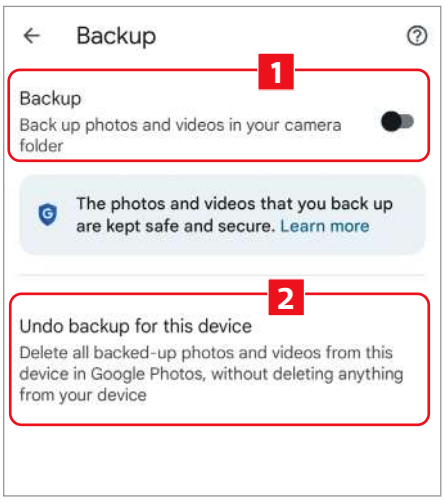
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Delete your backed-up photos from Google Photos

Google Photos has added an interesting option to its Android app (www.snipca.com/54507) that was already available in the iOS version (www.snipca.com/54508). It lets you undo backups of photos and videos you've made, without deleting the originals from your phone or tablet. This is useful if you want to start using a different photo-storage service, without losing your precious memories or leaving them in the 'cloud' with Google.

To undo the backup from your current device, tap your profile picture in Google Photos and choose 'Photos settings' then Backup. Switch off the Backup setting at the top of the screen (1 in our screenshot below left) and tap 'Undo backup for this device' 2 – you won't see this option until you disable Backup.


Backup
1
Backup
Back up photos and videos in your camera folder
The photos and videos that you back up are kept safe and secure. Learn more
2
Undo backup for this device
Delete all backed-up photos and videos from this device in Google Photos, without deleting anything from your device

Google Photos will now explain what undoing backup entails – namely removing all photos and video from its service, including albums, memories and search results, but not from your device. If you're happy to proceed, select 'I understand' and tap 'Delete Google Photos backup'.

Note that content you've backed up from other devices will still appear in Google Photos. You can re-enable Backup to upload your pictures and videos again.

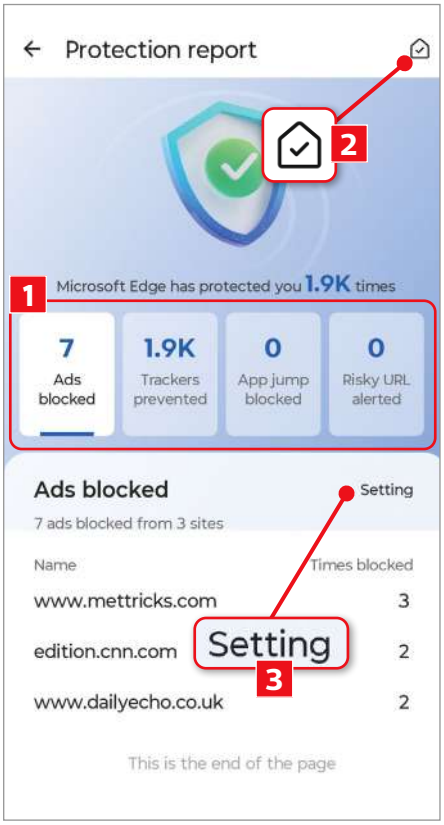
ANDROID

Monitor and boost Edge's privacy protection

Microsoft has updated its Edge browser for Android (www.snipca.com/54509) with a useful feature called 'Protection report'. This tells you how many ads, trackers and malicious sites the browser has blocked using its built-in privacy and security tools.

'Protection report' is similar to the Privacy Stats provided by Brave browser on its home page. It also lets you tweak Edge's settings to boost its protection, if it's not blocking enough privacy threats.

By default, the feature is hidden away, but Edge gives you the option to add a shortcut to your home/new-tab page. To do so, tap the browser's three-line menu button and choose Settings, then 'Privacy and security'.



Select 'Protection report' to see how many ads, trackers and risky URLs have been blocked so far (1 in our screenshot above), including details of the relevant domains. Press the icon in the top-right corner 2 to add a shortcut to your home page, so you can access this information more quickly.

If Edge doesn't seem to be blocking any

BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

ClassiPod

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54512

This brilliant retro music player recreates the look of an iPod Classic, complete with a click wheel and Apple-style interface. Go into its Settings and choose Change Directory to select a folder containing audio files. You can then browse and listen to artists, albums and songs without an internet connection or streaming subscription.

Organic Maps

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54502

iOS www.snipca.com/54501

This excellent open-source alternative to Google Maps has been updated to improve its cycling routes and add extra detail to its maps, including communication towers, lifeguards and minor powerlines. The iOS version has a handy new split-screen view which lets you view the map and your search results side by side.

Proton VPN

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/54504

iOS www.snipca.com/54532

Proton VPN has redesigned its iOS app to make it as easy to use as the Android version. It now provides clearer information about your connection location and speed, and the number of ads and trackers the (paid-for) NetShield feature has blocked. Both apps have new widgets for accessing Proton VPN from your home screen.

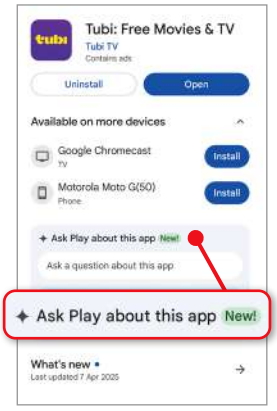
*Contains in-app purchases

ads, tap Setting next to 'Ads blocked' 3 to configure its ad blocker – the browser has Adblock Plus built-in. Ensure 'Block ads' is switched on, and (optionally) that it isn't allowing 'acceptable ads'. You can also set Edge's 'Tracking prevention' to 'Strict' to block more online trackers.

ANDROID

Ask the Google Play Store questions about apps

Google has integrated its AI assistant Gemini with its Play Store. This means you can now ask questions about Android apps before you install them, rather than scouring the developer's description and user reviews for the required information.



To use the new option, look for the 'Ask Play about this app' box (see screenshot left) on an app's Play Store listing. You can either choose one of the suggested questions or type one of your own. Examples include: 'Are there any hidden fees or in-app purchases?', 'How do I use this app?' and 'What do people like most about this app?'.

Note that the 'Ask Play' AI feature is currently only available for select apps in the Play Store – these are mainly popular ones, such as streaming, shopping and social-media services. It should roll out to more apps in due course.

iOS

Make WhatsApp your default calls and messages app

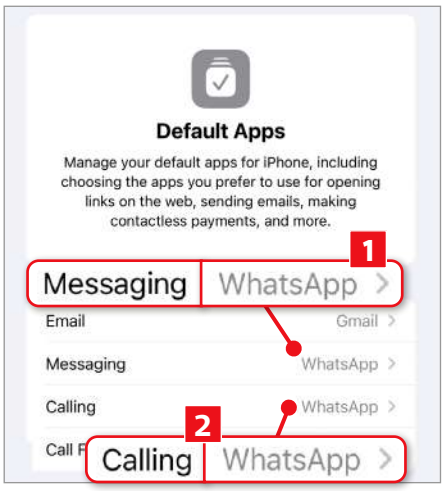
One of the most useful features introduced in iOS 18.2 was a Default Apps screen in the Apps section of Settings. This makes it much easier to switch from using Apple's own apps for everyday tasks to your preferred third-party tools.

WhatsApp has now taken advantage of the feature by letting you set it as the default app for calls and messages on your iPhone. However, this doesn't mean WhatsApp will replace Apple's Phone and Messages apps – when you receive calls and messages, they'll still come via those tools.

Instead it means that when you tap the Call or Message button in the Phone or Contacts app, it will open WhatsApp to perform the action – as long as the person you want to contact also has WhatsApp installed.

To make WhatsApp the default, open Settings on your iPhone and tap Apps, then Default Apps. Press 'Messaging' and select WhatsApp (1 in our screenshot right), then do the same for Calling 2. You can revert to Apple's own apps should you change your mind.

Note that the option requires the latest version of WhatsApp and iOS 18.4, so update to both if you haven't already done so.



BEST APPS FOR... Observing insects

Picture Insect: Bug Identifier

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/54513
iOS www.snipca.com/54514
Take or upload a picture of an insect and this app will use AI to identify the critter. It provides information about common species, including whether they're harmful to humans and plants, and advice about treating bites and stings. Subscribe for £28 a year, after a seven-day free trial, for extra features and unlimited identifications.
Best For Identifying insects

iNaturalist

Free
Android www.snipca.com/54515
iOS www.snipca.com/54516
This app also helps you identify insects, but iNaturalist's main purpose is to record and share observations about different species of all flora and fauna. You can use it to report sightings of insects in your garden and area, find out when and where they've been spotted near you by the iNaturalist community, and learn more about them.
Best For Reporting insect sightings

Spot-a-Bee

Free
Android www.snipca.com/54517
iOS www.snipca.com/54518
Developed by researchers in the UK, this app wants to reverse the decline in the UK's bee population by determining which plants and trees are most important to our buzzy friends. Upload photos and details of bees you spot, including their type and what they were visiting, to add it to the community map. Be careful not to get stung.
Best For Sharing bee observations

*Contains in-app purchases

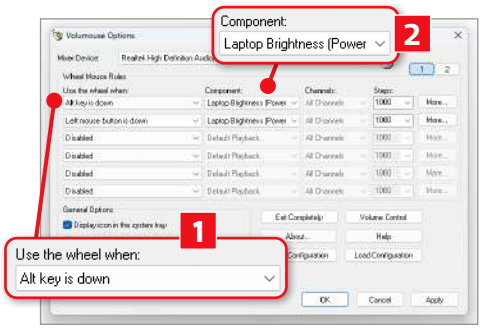
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Control laptop brightness with your mouse wheel

NirSoft's Volumouse has been a favourite program of ours ever since Issue 442's Workshop, back in 2015. It's a clever little tool that lets you increase your computer's volume by scrolling your mouse wheel. A recent update (2.20) adds the option to control your laptop screen's brightness level.

Visit www.snipca.com/54596 then scroll down and click one of the download options below the Feedback heading (make sure you don't click any of the adverts on NirSoft's page). If Windows throws up a warning, click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

Now open the program and click one of the 'Use the wheel when' dropdown menus to decide which combination of key press and mouse scroll will change the brightness. We've chosen when the Alt key is pressed (1 in our screenshot below). Next choose 'Laptop Brightness (Power Management)' in the Component dropdown menu 2. Click OK to confirm.

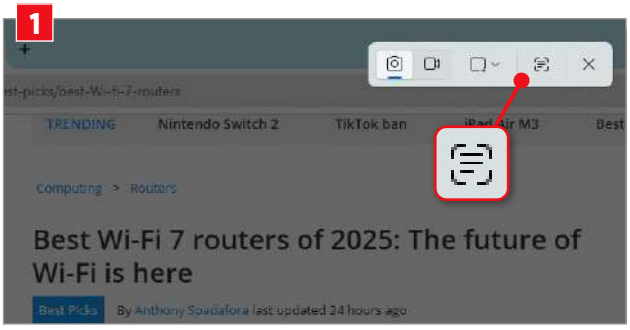


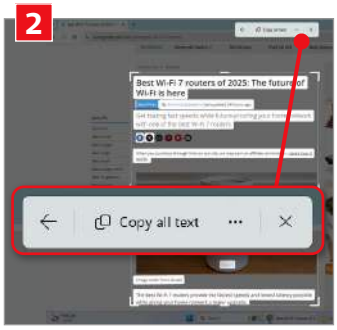
WINDOWS 11 INSIDER

Extract text from Snipping Tool

Microsoft has added Text Extractor to Snipping Tool, making it easier to copy text from an image to your clipboard. To use the feature – which is available only to Windows Insiders on the Canary and Device channels at the moment – open Snipping Tool, then click the 'Text extractor' icon at the top (see screenshot 1 below). Now click the three dots and select 'Automatically copy text' or 'Remove line breaks' (or both). These settings will apply every time you use Text Extractor until you change them.

Next, using your mouse or trackpad, draw the area of the screen containing the text you want to capture. A multi-coloured bar will appear around it for a few seconds to indicate the text is being captured. If you've chosen 'Automatically copy text', you'll see a 'Text is copied' confirmation appear at the top. If not, you'll see the highlighted text you're about to capture and the 'Copy all text' option at the top to click 2. In both cases, your text is ready to be pasted wherever you like.



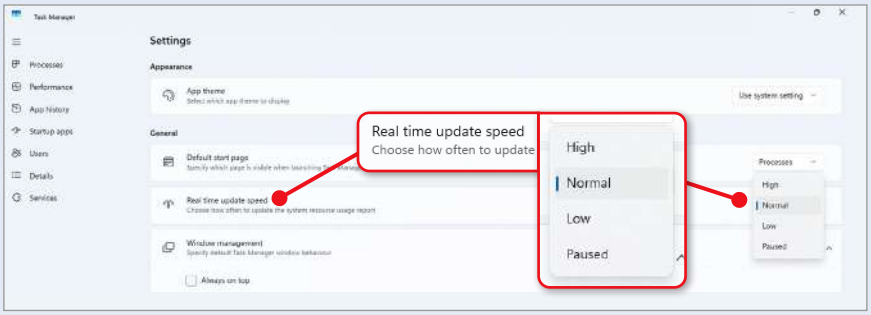


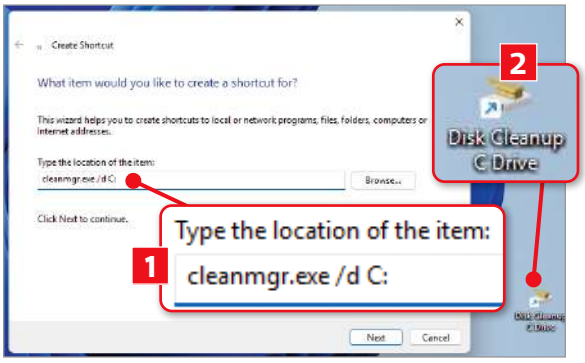
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Pause Task Manager with a single key press

By default, Task Manager updates its readings every second, making it hard to get a snapshot of how much data specific software and processes are using. Pausing these updates is simple, however – simply press the CTRL key.

In Windows 10 you can also pause them by clicking View at the top, then Update Speed followed by Paused. These options also let you set the update speed to High (every half a second) and Low (four seconds). In Windows 11, you'll find these options by clicking Settings at the bottom left, then clicking the 'Real time update speed' dropdown menu (see screenshot).





WINDOWS 10 & 11

Create desktop shortcut for Disk Cleanup

You can create a desktop shortcut for Disk Cleanup to run in a specific drive on your computer. Right-click your desktop followed by New then Shortcut. Now type cleanmgr.exe /d C: (1 in our screenshot above), choosing another drive letter if not C: (copy this command from our Pastebin account: www.snipca.com/54608).

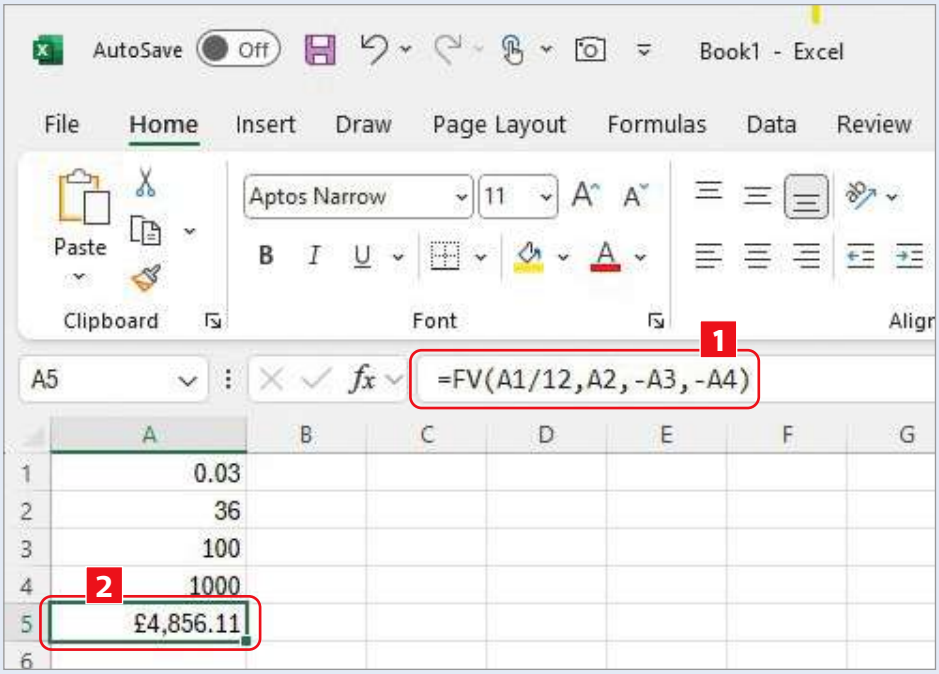
Now click Next and choose a name for the shortcut (for example, Disk Cleanup C Drive). Click Finish and an icon will appear with the name you chose 2. Click this to open Disk Cleanup.

MICROSOFT EXCEL

Calculate compound interest of your savings

The =FV function in Excel is perfect for calculating how much your savings will grow over time with compound interest. Type your interest rate in cell A1 as a decimal, so for example three per cent annual interest would be 0.03. Next, in A2 type how many months you want to calculate for, and in A3 type your monthly payment. In A4 type your starting balance. And finally, in A5 type the formula =FV(A1/12,A2,-A3,-A4) (1 in our screenshot). This formula divides the annual interest rate by 12 to calculate the monthly rate.

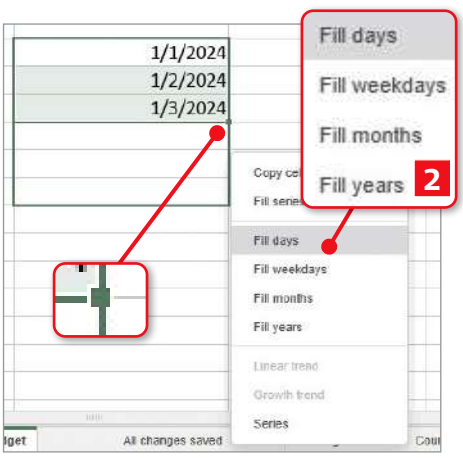
In our example, we're starting with £1,000 and will be saving £100 a month for 36 months, at a rate of three per cent. It gives us a compounded total of £4,856.11 2.



ONLYOFFICE

Autofill spreadsheets with days, months and years

Version 8.3 of OnlyOffice, released in February, makes it easier to auto-fill spreadsheet cells with weekdays, months and years. Start with a date like 1/1/2025, then select your cells. Now right-click the 'fill' icon in the bottom cell (a small green square at the bottom right of a cell – 1 in our screenshot below) and drag it to where you want the weekdays, months or years to appear. Now release your mouse button and you'll see options to fill in days (including weekends), weekdays, months and years 2. Click what you want and they'll appear in the empty cells you've selected.

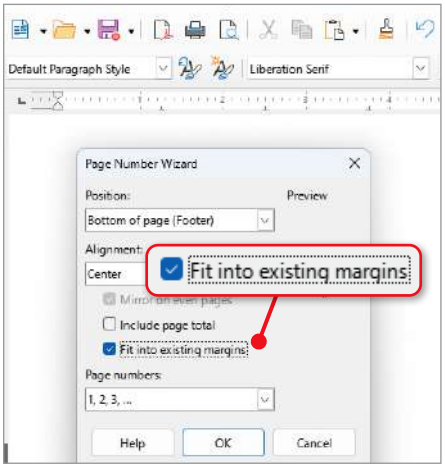


LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Make page numbers fit into existing margins

Whenever you added page numbers in previous versions of LibreOffice Writer, especially in headers or footers, they would sometimes fall outside your set margins. LibreOffice would then repaginate your document to accommodate the change, pushing text on to new pages. This could mess up your carefully designed document. That's a pain if you've already laid things out carefully, especially in longer documents.

Version 25.2, released in February, fixes that. Click Insert at the top followed by Page Number, then tick 'Fit into existing margins' (see screenshot below left). Click OK to confirm.

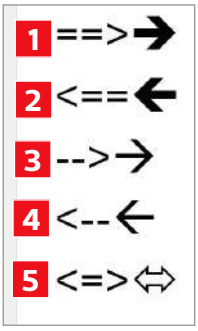


MICROSOFT WORD

Type differently sized arrows

You can type arrows straight into Word, saving you the hassle of opening the Symbols box. What you type resembles the direction and thickness of the arrow.

For a thick right-pointing arrow type ==> (that's two equals signs and a right-pointing chevron – 1 in our screenshot below), while for the same arrow pointing left type <== 2. To make the arrow thinner type dashes instead of equals sign – for example, --> 3 and <-- 4. For a double-headed arrow type <=> 5. The arrows appear as soon you finish typing – you don't have to press Space or Enter. These tricks also work in Google Docs, but not in LibreOffice or OnlyOffice.



In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Schedule posts on Facebook

Facebook's Meta Business Suite is a helpful set of tools for managing pages. Many of its features, such as those that let you post adverts and attract customers, are aimed at businesses, but there are several free tools that are useful for running clubs, such as scheduling posts to go live on a set date. It's a great way to promote events, though you can't schedule more than 30 days ahead.

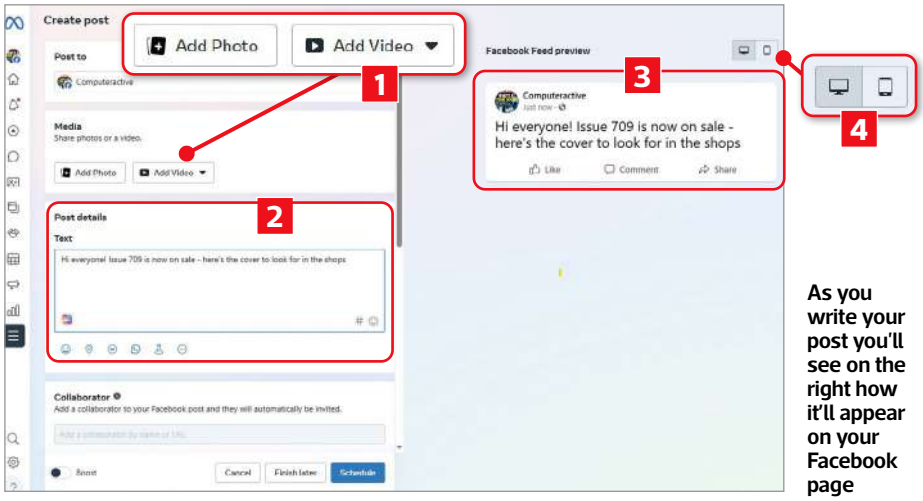
We'll explain how to do it, using this issue's on-sale date of Wednesday 7 May as an example.

Choose your date and time

Log in using your personal Facebook account, then select your club's page. Now visit https://business.facebook.com or click Meta Business Suite in the left-hand menu on your club's home page.

Next, click Planner on the left to launch a calendar, with today's date highlighted. This will show at what time your followers have been most active during that week, indicating when it might be best to schedule your message.

Now use the arrows at the top left to find and select the date you want your message to appear. A 'Schedule post' box will now appear, letting you type the time for the post (see screenshot below). Click Save to confirm.



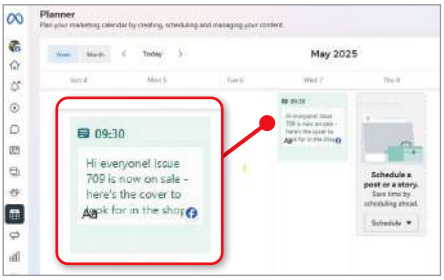
As you write your post you'll see on the right how it'll appear on your Facebook page

Write your post

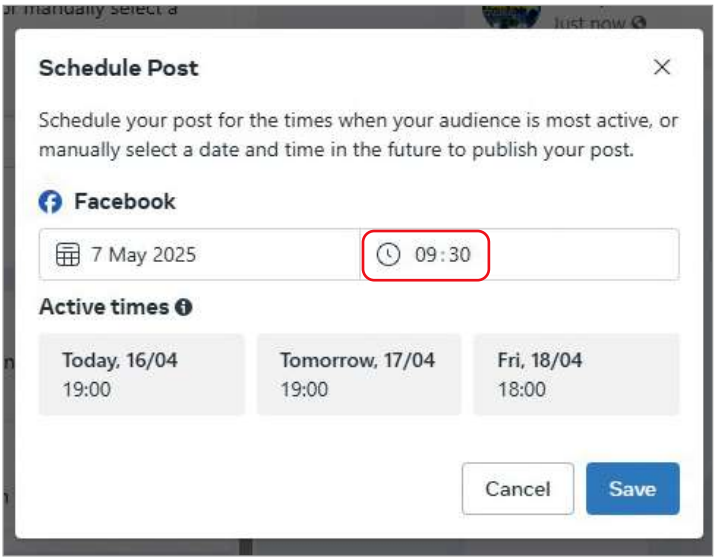
Next, on the left, add any relevant photos or videos (1 in our screenshot above) then write your post in the 'Post details' box below 2. As you do so, you'll see a preview on the right showing how it'll look on your page 3 – you can switch between PC- and phone-screen previews 4.

Scroll further down and you'll see options for saving the post to a Facebook Story (see Issue 705, page 48), and whether the post should be Public (everyone can see it) or Restricted (choose specific people to see it).

Once you're happy, scroll to the bottom and click Schedule. It will then appear shaded in pale green on your calendar (see screenshot above). You can also click 'Finish later' to save the post, ready for you to complete later. This will also be saved on your calendar but marked as 'Draft' instead. You can see all your current drafts by clicking the Drafts button to the right of your calendar. If you've scheduled posts across several weeks, you can see them by switching to the Month view at the top left.



Your scheduled post will appear in pale green on your calendar



Choose your date on the calendar, then type the time you want the post to be sent

Edit and reschedule your post

There are several ways of editing your scheduled post. If you need to only change the date, simply drag and drop it to a different day in your calendar. This brings up a 'Reschedule post' box where you can set a time. To change the text, images or videos, hover your cursor over your post in the calendar, then click the three dots that appear, followed by 'Edit Post'.

Next issue: Lock rows/columns when sharing spreadsheets

What's All the

Fuss About...

Windows 'inetpub' folder

It took Microsoft a week to explain what this mysterious folder is

What is it?

A folder that was unexpectedly added to Windows 10 and 11 computers in April's Patch Tuesday update (KB5055523 and KB5055528 respectively), released on 8 April. It appears on the root C drive (see screenshot 1) and is empty when you open it 2. Nobody seemed to know why it had been added.

Not even Microsoft?

Presumably it did, but it failed to give any information when releasing the update, baffling users everywhere. Many thought it was a bug Microsoft hadn't spotted.

What's it for?

It's associated with Microsoft's Internet Information Services (IIS) and has been around for years. It's normally created when you start hosting websites or building programs on your PC. It stores data generated by the sites and programs (at **C:\inetpub\logs\LogFiles**). If you don't do either then you can ignore the folder.

Great, so I can also delete it?

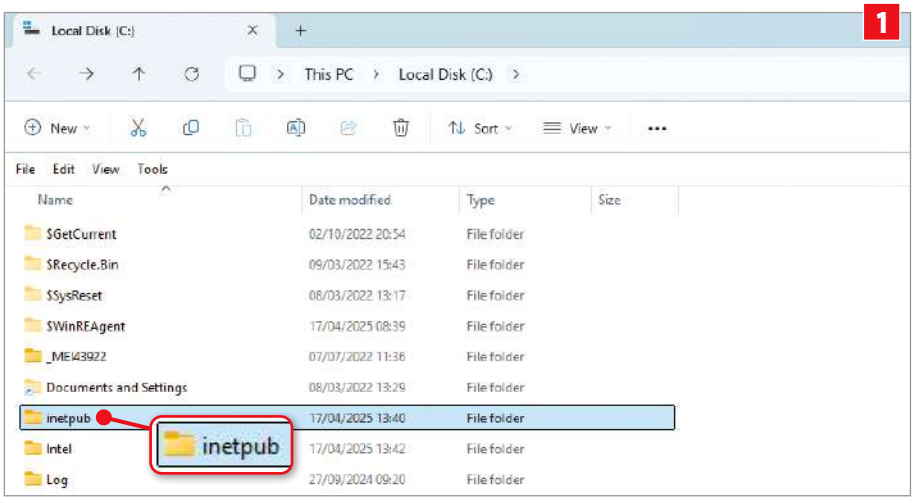
Ah, not so fast. When the folder first appeared lots of self-appointed experts said removing it would cause no problems. This seemed fair given what IIS is typically used for. But a week later Microsoft responded to the confusion by saying the folder is part of a fix for the CVE-2025-21204 security flaw (www.snipca.com/54589), which leads to symbolic links not being handled properly.

What are symbolic links?

They're Windows shortcuts. But rather than pointing to a file or folder like a regular shortcut, they pretend to be the actual file or folder. Windows and other software often treat them as the real thing, which is useful for performing lots of clever tricks behind the scenes.

Such as?

Say you're running out of space on your C drive, so you move a big folder from there to the D drive. If you create a symbolic link in the old location pointing to the new one, programs won't notice the difference – they'll still think the files are on the C drive, eliminating potential problems.

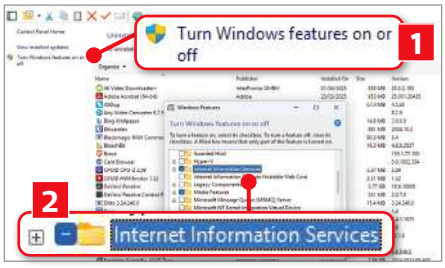


So what's the risk with symbolic links?

Hackers can exploit them to access or overwrite files they shouldn't be able to. That's a severe threat, so Microsoft had no choice but to resolve it. The folder needs to stay on your computer to keep you protected, so Microsoft advises you not to delete it.

What if you'd already deleted it?

No problem – you can bring it back.



If you've deleted the 'inetpub' folder, turn it back on in Control Panel

Search for and open Control Panel, then click 'Programs and Features'. Click 'Turn Windows features on or off' (1 in our screenshot below left), then scroll down and select Internet Information Services 2 before clicking OK. Check your C drive to see if it's returned.

Why did Microsoft wait a week before telling people not to delete it?

Possibly because it wanted to check whether the security fix worked – but if so, it shouldn't have released it in the first place. Alternatively, it may have withheld details to avoid tipping off attackers about the security flaw. Whatever the reason, it probably decided to come clean only after perplexed users started complaining on social media. Not for the first time, Microsoft took too long to clarify a confusing update.

So what should I do with the folder?

Nothing. Take no notice. You never saw it – right?

BLOCK ALL SPAM CALLS

Don't let spammers and scammers make you dread answering the phone. Robert Irvine explains the most effective ways to detect and avoid nuisance calls and messages

Scam calls are a scourge of modern times. We've all experienced that heartsinking moment when we answer our phones to hear a detached voice claim we're being fined by HMRC, have a virus on our PC or were recently involved in a car accident.

UK residents reportedly receive an average of four nuisance calls a month, but in our experience it's much higher. Gone are the days when you might get the occasional cold call from a local double-glazing firm or market-research company. Spam calls now come from all over the world from a motley variety of telemarketers, fraudsters and opportunists – both human and robotic.

Although caller ID makes it easier to see if it's a friend, business or stranger phoning you, unless you wilfully ignore all numbers you don't recognise – which can cause you to miss important calls – it's very difficult to avoid nuisance callers. In this feature, we explain the best ways to deal with these pests, by identifying and blocking them without answering your phone, so you can focus on the calls you actually want to receive.

We reveal how to activate spam-call protection on your mobile and landline phones, recommend the best call-filtering apps and also explain how to stop spam text messages.

The spammers already have your number – now we've got theirs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Avoid spam calls by sending them direct to voicemail
- Block all phone calls from unidentified numbers
- Screen calls so you can decide whether to answer them
- Block spam automatically using a dedicated app
- Stop scammers ringing you on your landline
- Filter spam text messages on your smartphone

YOUR SPAM-CALL QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What defines a spam call?

The term 'spam call' refers to any unsolicited or unwanted call, typically targeting a large number of people. Also known as nuisance calls, they're mainly used for marketing and fraudulent purposes.

Common examples include telemarketing calls, which aggressively try to sell you a product or service; robocalls, which play pre-recorded messages when you answer; and scam calls, which try to obtain your personal information, often by impersonating reputable organisations.

Others are merely annoying, such as silent or abandoned calls, which may occur when a spammer is testing your number, or when an auto-dialer has made more calls than there are agents available to handle them.

Can spam calls be dangerous?

Yes, very, especially the scam variety. Phishing calls pretend to be your bank, the police, a government department or a well-known company, and try to scare you into telling them personal information, such as your bank-account details, so they can steal your money and identity.

Tech-support scams claim your computer or phone has a virus and urge you to install remote-access software, which enables them to take over your device, infect it with malware and steal your data. And the last few years have seen a worrying rise in voice-cloning scams (www.snipca.com/54566), which use AI to impersonate people you know – including friends and family members – to con you into sending them money.

Particularly scary is that once you've fallen for a scam, your name and phone number may be added to a 'mugs' or 'suckers' list, so other scammers can target you with further scams.

How do spam callers get your number?

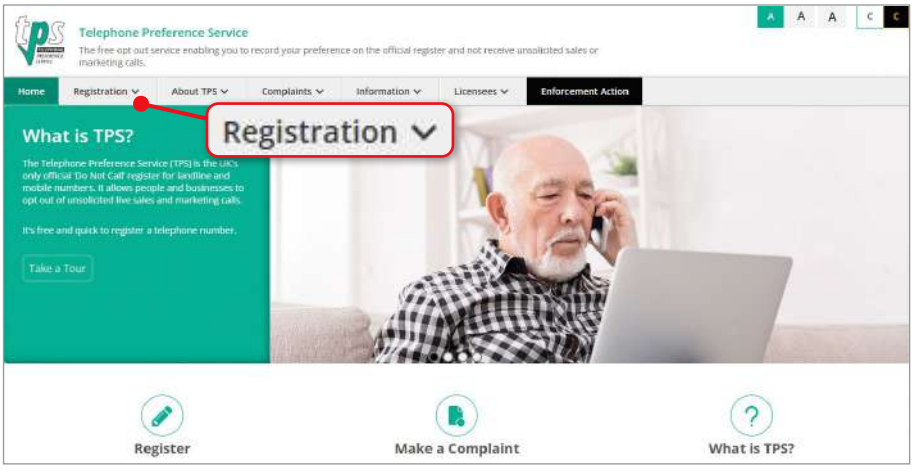
Your number may have been stolen in a data breach or hack, 'scraped' from a website or bought from a data broker along with thousands of other numbers. The auto diallers used by robocalls simply run through variations of millions of numbers, and mark those who answer as 'active'.

Make sure you untick the box for marketing communications when you register with websites or enter competitions, to stop your number being passed to third-party companies and potential spammers. You can install a 'burner' app, such as Hushed (www.snipca.com/54565), to conceal your real mobile number from companies you call and text, but you'll need to pay a monthly subscription.

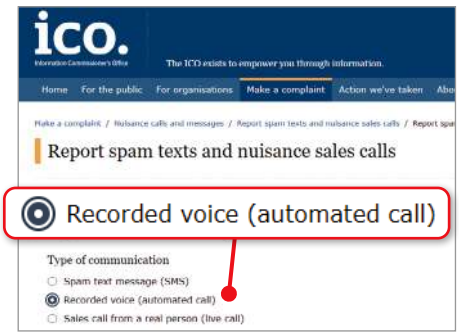
Are spam calls illegal in the UK?

In the UK, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) handles "predatory, nuisance marketing calls" and advises registering your landline and mobile number with the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) at www.snipca.com/54560 (see screenshot below). This opts you out of unsolicited sales and marketing calls, and companies that contact you after you've registered (without your consent) are breaking the law.

Although it's definitely worth registering with the TPS, scam calls are outside its remit because it only covers legitimate UK companies. For most spam calls, it's as ineffective as the 'do not track' requests browsers make to websites.



Register with the Telephone Preference Service to block unsolicited marketing calls from UK companies


ico.
Report spam texts and nuisance sales calls
Recorded voice (automated call)
Type of communication
Spam text message (SMS)
Recorded voice (automated call)
Sales call from a real person (live call)

Report unwanted sales calls, robocalls and spam messages to the ICO

Robocalls are strictly forbidden unless (for some strange reason) you've consented to receive them. This rule is enforced by the ICO under the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR), but again it only applies to UK organisations.

In January this year, Ofcom introduced a new requirement for phone companies to identify and block all numbers from abroad that imitate UK landline numbers (www.snipca.com/54563). That's obviously great news – BT has been able to stop up to one million of these calls per day – but doesn't apply to spoofed mobile numbers. Ofcom says "further measures" are being considered to block these,

You can report nuisance calls to the ICO at www.snipca.com/54561 (see screenshot above), but for scam calls you need to go through Action Fraud (www.snipca.com/54562).

How can you identify spam calls?

Some spam calls can be identified from their unfamiliar area codes or prefixes, but many scammers spoof their caller IDs to look like local and legitimate numbers. There may also be a pause, click or beep before a person speaks or message plays, while the autodialer connects you to the human or robot agent.

Scammers often create a sense of urgency about sharing your info and may even resort to threats. Legitimate organisations never ask you to provide personal data in unsolicited calls, so be wary of such requests. However, the strongest protection against spam and scam calls is to avoid them altogether, using the methods we explain in this feature.

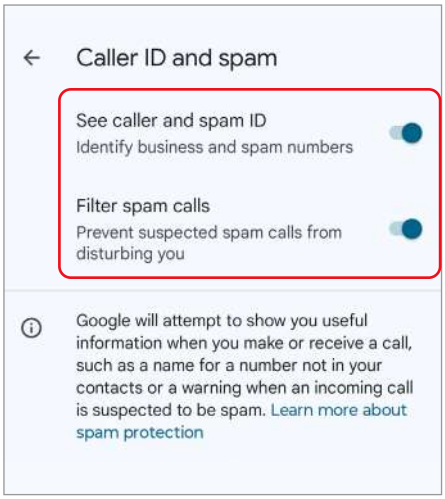
BLOCK SPAM CALLS ON YOUR SMARTPHONE

Block spam calls on an Android phone

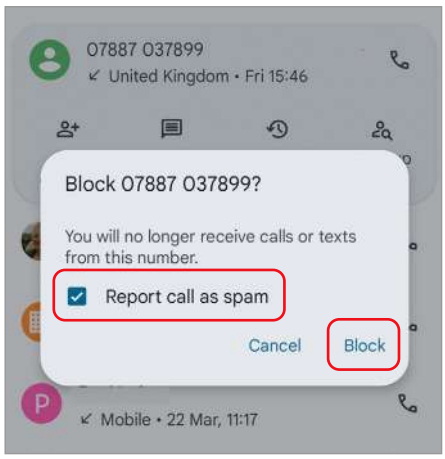
The Phone app on Android phones has a 'Caller ID and spam' feature that detects some spam calls. These are flagged as 'Spam' when you receive them, if Google identifies their numbers as known spammers.

You can also set your phone to filter spam calls, so they don't disturb you in the first place – though the callers can still leave you voicemail messages. The increasingly devious methods used by spammers mean this option isn't completely effective, but it will certainly reduce the number of calls you receive.

These features should be enabled by default on Android phones, but to double-check open the Phone app and tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner. Select 'Settings', then 'Caller ID and spam'. Switch on the options 'See caller and spam ID' and 'Filter spam calls' (see screenshot left).


Caller ID and spam
See caller and spam ID
Identify business and spam numbers
Filter spam calls
Prevent suspected spam calls from disturbing you
Google will attempt to show you useful information when you make or receive a call, such as a name for a number not in your contacts or a warning when an incoming call is suspected to be spam. Learn more about spam protection

The Phone app on Android phones detects and blocks some spam calls


07887 037899
United Kingdom • Fri 15:46
Block 07887 037899?
You will no longer receive calls or texts from this number.
Report call as spam
Cancel
Block
Mobile • 22 Mar, 11:17

You can block nuisance numbers manually and report them as spam

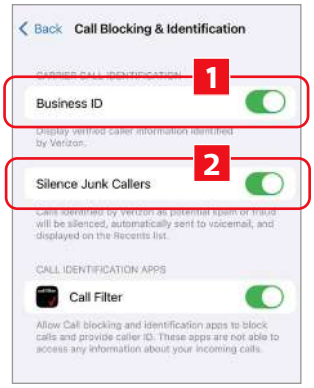
You can go even further by blocking all calls from unknown numbers. Choose 'Blocked numbers' on the Settings screen and turn on 'Unknown – Block calls from unidentified numbers'. However, this risks missing important calls from private numbers, such as delivery drivers and healthcare providers, so is only advisable as a last resort.

Once you've declined or ended the spam call, you can block the nuisance number to prevent future disturbance. Long-press it in your call history and select 'Block/report spam'. Tick the box 'Report call as spam' and tap Block (see screenshot above) – choose 'Unblock' if you mistakenly block a number.

Samsung phones use a feature called Smart Call to flag and block suspected spam and fraud calls, and let you easily block and report them. To activate this, switch on 'Caller ID and spam protection' in 'Call settings', followed by 'Block spam and scam calls'.

Block spam calls on an iPhone

Your iPhone identifies and blocks spam calls using information from Apple Business Connect, your mobile provider and supported call-identification apps you install (see page 53). To enable this protection in iOS 17 or later, open the Settings app and choose Phone, then 'Call Blocking & Identification'.



Your iPhone can identify spam calls and send them straight to voicemail

Switch on Business ID (1 in our screenshot above) to help your iPhone recognise legitimate numbers and detect nuisance ones, and Silence Junk Callers 2 to send spam and scam calls directly to voicemail without disturbing you. The 'Caller Identification apps' option lets you select a third-party app to handle incoming calls and block unwanted ones.

From the Phone app screen, you can also set your iPhone to silence unknown callers, which means you'll only receive calls from people in your contacts and any numbers you recently dialled yourself. Calls from unknown numbers will be diverted to voicemail.

To block spam callers manually, open the Phone app and tap Recents. Tap the 'i' information icon next to a nuisance number and choose Block Caller. Alternatively, swipe left on the call, press the Block (orange-hand) button and tap 'Block and Report Junk'.

To unblock a caller, select Blocked Contacts on the Phone screen. Tap Edit, press the red symbol next to the number and choose Unblock.

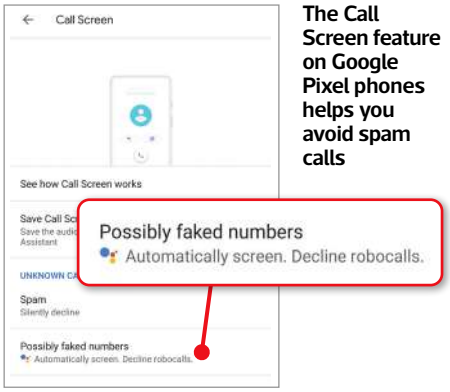
Block spam calls via your mobile network

Last November, mobile network O2 launched a feature called Call Defence (www.snipca.com/54540), which uses AI to detect spam and scam calls. It warns you of suspicious numbers before you answer, so you can decide whether to risk picking up.

Call Defence has been activated automatically for O2's Pay Monthly customers – at no extra charge. Pay As You Go customers will receive a message when it's available to them. The company is also fighting nuisance calls with its AI pensioner Daisy (www.snipca.com/54541, pictured), who wastes scammers' time when they dial 'her' number (which O2 cunningly got added to online 'mugs lists') by rambling away indefinitely.

EE introduced its spam-call-detection feature Scam Guard last July (www.snipca.com/54542), which costs £1 a month with a pay-monthly plan (it's not available on pay-as-you-go).

All UK mobile networks, including MVNOs such as Giffgaff and Smarty, advise reporting nuisance calls by texting the word call and the number to 7726.



The Call Screen feature on Google Pixel phones helps you avoid spam calls

Screen calls before you answer them

Google Pixel phones include a useful feature called Call Screen, which lets you screen calls before you answer them. It helps you avoid speaking to spammers and scammers, and deters them from calling again.

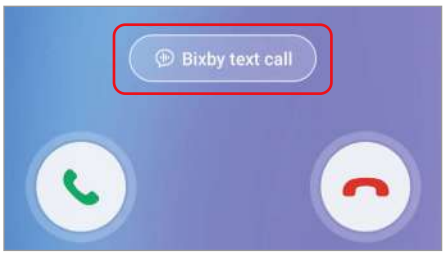
Like a virtual receptionist, Call Screen asks the caller who they are and why they're calling, and provides a transcript of what they respond. You can then either pick up the call, hang up or choose a suggested response such as "Please remove this number from your mailing and contact list". Call Screen also offers AI replies that tailor its responses to the nature of the call.

To activate the feature on a Pixel phone, tap the three-dot menu icon in the Phone app, choose Settings and switch on 'Spam and Call Screen' or Call Screen (depending on your Pixel model). You can set Call Screen to work automatically when it detects spam calls, possibly faked numbers (see screenshot left) and first-time callers, or use it manually by tapping Screen Call. Hopefully, the feature will come to other Android phones in due course, but in the meantime it's one of the best reasons to buy a Pixel.

The latest Samsung Galaxy phones (S20 and above), running One UI 5.1 or later, have a call-screening option called Text Call – or Bixby Text Call on some models. This answers incoming calls using the responses of your choice and provides a transcript of the caller's reply, so you can decide whether to take the call, respond via text or hang up.

Enable the feature by tapping the three-dot icon in the Phone app and choosing Settings, then 'Text call' or 'Bixby text call'. Download a language pack if prompted, choose a voice and set up your responses. When you receive a call from an unknown number, tap the 'Text call' or 'Bixby text call' button (see screenshot below) to avoid answering.

Apple's Live Voicemail feature, introduced in iOS 17, lets you send incoming calls to voicemail and read transcriptions of messages as they're left. It's a useful way to screen and ignore potential spam calls, but curiously no UK mobile networks support it yet.



The latest Samsung Galaxy phones can screen calls before you answer them

BLOCK SPAM CALLS USING A MOBILE APP

While the spam-protection features in Android and iOS are useful and welcome, to identify and block *all* nuisance calls, you need a specialist app. These use massive global databases of spam and scam numbers, which are constantly updated to combat the latest threats, and offer sophisticated tools for dealing with unwanted calls. Here are the best apps for avoiding spam calls in the UK.

GOLD AWARD

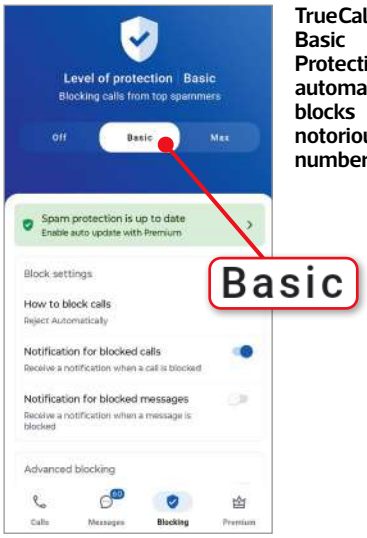
Truecaller

Android www.snipca.com/54547
iOS www.snipca.com/54548

With more than 450 million users worldwide, Truecaller is the most popular app for identifying and blocking spam and scam calls, reportedly detecting 56 billion in 2024 alone. In January, it finally became fully compatible with iPhones, allowing for real-time caller ID and automatic blocking of nuisance calls.

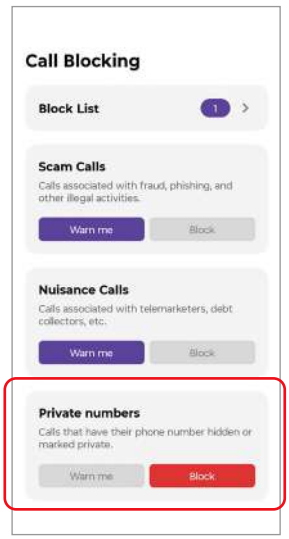
To use Truecaller, set it as your default caller ID and spam app, and it will start monitoring all your incoming calls. When you receive a call from a number that's not in your contacts, Truecaller will attempt to identify the caller from its huge database, and tell you if it's a known spam or business number.

Its free Basic protection (see screenshot above) automatically blocks the 'top spammers' in the UK and can be configured to block unknown and private numbers, callers from foreign countries and anyone who isn't a contact, as well as numbers you select manually. It also filters spam messages.



TrueCaller's Basic Protection automatically blocks notorious spam numbers

Upgrade to Truecaller Premium to get Max protection, which identifies and blocks nuisance calls using AI. This costs £2.99 a month or £19.90 a year, after a three-day free trial, and also removes ads and unlocks extra features. See www.snipca.com/54544 for the full list, but note that some aren't available in the UK.



Hiya blocks private numbers automatically but you need to pay to block spam

SILVER AWARD

Hiya

Android www.snipca.com/54550
iOS www.snipca.com/54549

Hiya helps legitimate businesses avoid their calls being labelled as spam, and consumers avoid calls from fraudulent businesses – so everybody wins. It powers the call-protection features used by many phone companies, including Samsung's Smart Call (see page 52), and its own app makes it easy to identify nuisance calls without answering.

Hiya's colour-coded backgrounds let

you instantly determine the risk level of incoming calls – such as purple for unknown, orange for suspected spam and red for scam or fraud. With its free plan, you can block private numbers (see screenshot on page 53), specific area codes and numbers from your call history, but to automatically stop unsolicited calls, you need a Premium subscription.

This costs £3.99 a month or £24.49 a year, after a seven-day free trial, which is more expensive than Truecaller but includes some useful tools. For example, you can perform reverse lookups of numbers to discover who they belong to and prevent spammers from leaving voicemail messages.

Hiya recently launched an AI Phone app (www.snipca.com/54546), which screens and responds to calls using AI, and identifies AI-generated voices, but it's currently only available in the US.

BRONZE AWARD

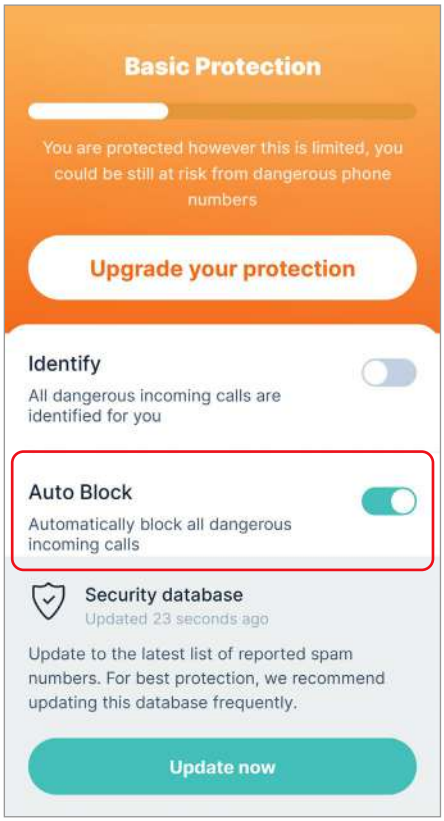
Call Blocker

Android www.snipca.com/54550
iOS www.snipca.com/54551

Call Blocker is the official app of UnknownPhone.com, which you may know from its 'Who called me?' service. This lets you search for mystery phone numbers that have called you to discover if anyone has reported them, and whether they're spam or scam-related.

The app uses this ever-growing database of more than 10 million numbers to detect nuisance calls you receive. Unlike TrueCaller and Hiya, it's UK-focused – meaning not just UK numbers, but global ones reported by UK residents – and it doesn't need to be set as your default caller ID app. Instead, it requires access to your contacts and call log. You can look up numbers from within the app and block or report them with a single tap. Call Blocker includes options for blocking international, unknown and hidden numbers, as well as specific area codes and non-geographic numbers such as 0800.

Its Basic Protection blocks dangerous calls automatically (see screenshot right), but to identify all calls when incoming you need a Premium subscription. This costs £3.99 a month or £7.99 for three months, after a seven-day free trial, and also removes ads. You get 75 free credits per week to check numbers and update the database.


Basic Protection
You are protected however this is limited, you could be still at risk from dangerous phone numbers
Upgrade your protection
Identify
All dangerous incoming calls are identified for you
Auto Block
Automatically block all dangerous incoming calls
Security database
Updated 23 seconds ago
Update to the latest list of reported spam numbers. For best protection, we recommend updating this database frequently.
Update now

Call Blocker blocks dangerous calls and looks up numbers in its database

Computer active **READER OFFER!**

Buy Windows 11 Pro for just £79.99!

ADD A DISC FOR £5.95

In this special offer you can buy **Windows 11 Pro** for just £79.99 – that's £140 cheaper than Microsoft's full price of £219.99.

To buy **Windows 11 Pro**, visit **www.snipca.com/41588** and click the red Buy Now button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

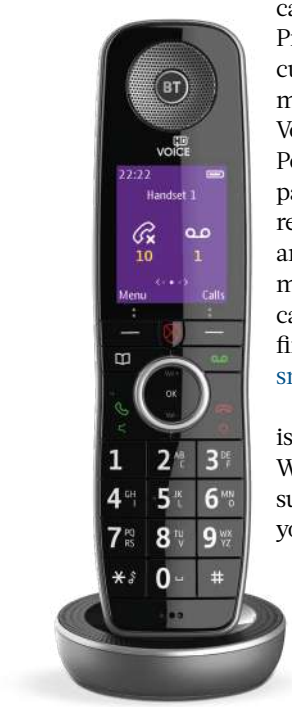
This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **20 May, 2025**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

BLOCK SPAM CALLS TO YOUR LANDLINE

Block nuisance calls using BT Call Protect

BT (and latterly **EE**) customers have long benefited from the company's Call Protect service, which prevents spam and scam calls from reaching your home phone. Free to all BT landline customers, Call Protect uses a combination of BT's Blocklist, algorithms and numbers you block yourself, to divert nuisance callers to your junk voicemail.

Last year, BT introduced a more sophisticated spam-protection service called Enhanced Call Protect, though only for customers who have migrated to its Digital Voice VoIP system. Powered by Hiya (see page 53), the service reportedly identified and blocked over 20 million spam and scam calls to landlines in its first four months (www.snipca.com/54567).



BT Digital Voice phones offer enhanced protection against spam calls

Enhanced Call Protect is very easy to use. When you receive a suspected spam call, your Digital Voice phone (pictured left) shows the message 'Nuisance?' so you can reject or answer it. Calls from registered businesses display their names, so you know they're genuine, while scam calls are identified using AI and sent to your junk voicemail.

The BT Blocklist and your Personal Blocklist are enabled by default. You can turn them off, and remove incorrectly blocked numbers, by dialling 1572 or by signing into your My BT account.

Block spam calls on other landline phones

Most internet providers with home-phone services offer protection against nuisance calls. Their options may change when they complete their switch to Digital Voice, but here's what you can currently use to avoid spam and scam calls.

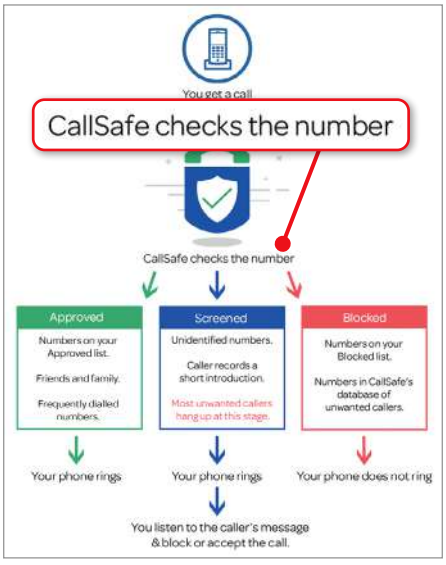
TalkTalk checks incoming calls using its free tool CallSafe (www.snipca.com/54568, see picture right). Numbers on your Approved list are put straight through, while those in CallSafe's database of unwanted callers and your own Blocked list are rejected, so your phone doesn't ring.

Unidentified numbers are screened by asking the caller to record a short introduction – at which point most spammers and scammers hang up – so you can decide whether to answer or block them. To activate CallSafe, dial 1472 from your TalkTalk landline, then press 1. See www.snipca.com/54570 for more detailed instructions.

Sky Talk (available with all Sky Broadband plans) handles nuisance calls using Sky Talk Shield (www.snipca.com/54571). This free feature intercepts and blocks robocalls, and screens calls from unknown human callers by getting them to speak their names. You can then either answer the call, block it or send it to voicemail.

Sky Talk Shield should be enabled by default if you added it when you signed up for Sky Talk or Sky Broadband (log into your My Sky account to check). If not, dial 1780 on your landline phone then press 1.

Virgin Media provides poor protection against spam calls on your landline, despite its partner O2 offering Call Defence (see page 52). Its 'Manage My Privacy' option includes Anonymous Call Rejection, which rejects calls from withheld numbers, and Caller Display, which identifies the number that's calling. This measly combination costs £3 a month on top of your standard bill.


You get a call
CallSafe checks the number
CallSafe checks the number
Approved
Numbers on your Approved list.
Friends and family.
Frequently dialled numbers.
Screened
Unidentified numbers.
Caller records a short introduction.
Most unwanted callers hang up at this stage.
Blocked
Numbers on your Blocked list.
Numbers in CallSafe's database of unwanted callers.
Your phone rings
Your phone rings
Your phone does not ring
You listen to the caller's message & block or accept the call.

TalkTalk's CallSafe service screens incoming calls and blocks unwanted callers

The BT4600 blocks nuisance calls at the touch of a button

Buy a device that blocks spam calls

Rather than rely on your landline provider to block spam calls, buy a third-party device. The BT4600 Big Button Advanced Call Blocker (£45 from www.snipca.com/54575, pictured above) is designed for older and less dextrous users, and lets you block nuisance callers at the touch of a big button.

It stores details of up to 1,000 spam and scam numbers, so they won't be able to ring you again, and can record calls for up to 60 minutes – useful for saving audio evidence of scammers. Provided your phone provider has Caller ID, the BT4600 also offers 'visual voicemail', which shows you who has left a message so you can decide whether to listen to it.

The BT4600 went on sale in 2016, but recent Amazon reviews confirm it still works very well. A slightly newer model, the BT Advanced Z (£60 from www.snipca.com/54576) also has a nuisance-call blocker, and alerts you to unknown callers while allowing friends and family through.

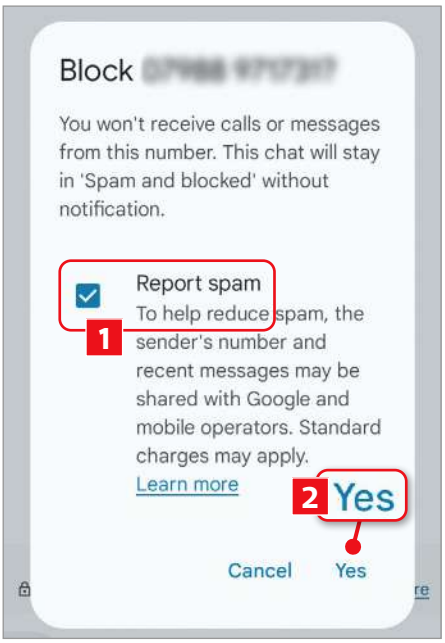
Alternatively, there are devices that connect to your landline phone to block unwanted callers. The CPR V10000 Call Blocker (£50 from www.snipca.com/54579) has a big red Block Now button you press to terminate calls and block their numbers, and an Allow List for only accepting calls from trusted numbers. It's pre-loaded with 10,000 known nuisance numbers to which you can add 2,000 more.

BLOCK SPAM MESSAGES ON YOUR PHONE

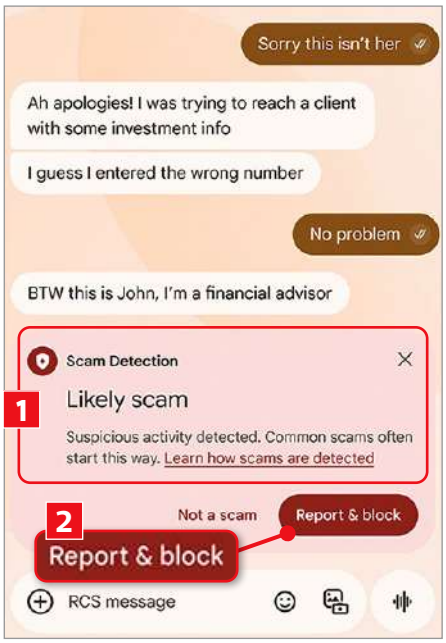
Although spam messages are easier to ignore than phone calls, they're just as annoying and potentially dangerous. Phishing scams delivered by SMS – known as 'smishing' – contain malicious links that try to trick you into divulging personal information, downloading malware and sending money to criminals.

These fraudulent texts are often very convincing, so it can be hard, for example, to tell the difference between a genuine message from a courier about your parcel and a fake one asking you to arrange redelivery by installing a data-stealing app. When in doubt, check the delivery firm's official website (see www.snipca.com/54588 for links).

As with nuisance calls (see page 52), you can report unsolicited messages to your mobile network by sending the details to 7726 (never reply to the senders), but it's preferable not to get them in the first place. Here, we recommend the best ways to avoid receiving junk messages on your phone.


Block
You won't receive calls or messages from this number. This chat will stay in 'Spam and blocked' without notification.
Report spam
To help reduce spam, the sender's number and recent messages may be shared with Google and mobile operators. Standard charges may apply.
Learn more
1
2 Yes
Cancel
Yes

Google Messages makes it easy to block and report spam messages by ticking this box


Sorry this isn't her
Ah apologies! I was trying to reach a client with some investment info
I guess I entered the wrong number
No problem
BTW this is John, I'm a financial advisor
Scam Detection
Likely scam
Suspicious activity detected. Common scams often start this way. Learn how scams are detected
1
2
Not a scam
Report & block
Report & block
RCS message

AI-powered Scam Detection spots suspicious activity in messages and warns you

Block spam text messages on Android

Google's Messages app, which comes installed on Android phones and is also available from the Play Store (www.snipca.com/54583), offers reliable protection against spam messages. When it detects a suspicious text, it either automatically moves it to a 'Spam and blocked' folder or warns you that it looks like spam and lets you report it.

Tap 'Report as spam' to confirm those suspicions or 'Not spam' if it's safe. When you receive a message from an unknown number, Google Messages will again give you the option to report it as spam or you can add the person as a contact so they're not flagged in future.

If Google Messages fails to detect a nuisance text, you can report and block it yourself. Tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner and choose 'Block and report spam'. Tick the 'Report spam' box (1 in our screenshot above left) and tap Yes 2. This will block all future calls and messages from that number, move the current text to your 'Spam and blocked' folder and share the details with Google and mobile networks so they can add it to their spammers' database.

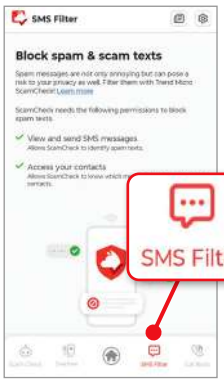
If you'd prefer not to open a potential spam message, in case you inadvertently tap a dangerous link, long-press it in your inbox, tap the three-dot menu icon and choose Block then 'Report as spam'. To see all the spam Google Messages has blocked, tap your profile icon in the top-right corner and select 'Spam and blocked'. Tap the three-dot icon top right to also view a list of blocked numbers.

If Google Messages keeps letting spam through, its protection may be disabled (it should be enabled by default). Tap your profile icon and choose 'Messages settings'. Select 'Spam protection' and switch on 'Enable spam protection'.

Google recently introduced AI-powered Scam Detection, which identifies suspicious patterns in SMS, MMS and RCS messages, both before and after they're received. This means that if you start chatting to an apparently innocuous person, Google Messages will study their replies for signs they could be a scammer. If so, it will warn you (1 in our screenshot above) so you can report and block them 2.

Boost your protection against scams

Trend Micro's excellent ScamCheck app for Android (www.snipca.com/54587) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54586) provides powerful protection against spam and scam messages. It uses AI to identify and alert you to any threats, and blocks them before they reach you.



Set ScamCheck as your default messaging app and its SMS Filter (see screenshot) will automatically filter and block junk messages and those containing phishing links and other security risks. It also sorts known and unknown senders into separate folders, so you can ignore the latter.

Similarly, its Call Block feature identifies and blocks robocalls, but this isn't currently available in the UK. You can, however, use Trend Micro's Deep Fake option to determine whether a person you're chatting to in a video call is AI-generated.

The ScamCheck tool itself analyses screenshots of potential scams, including text messages you receive and posts you see on social media, to tell you if they can be trusted. There's also a Web Guard that protects you from phishing sites in your mobile browser.

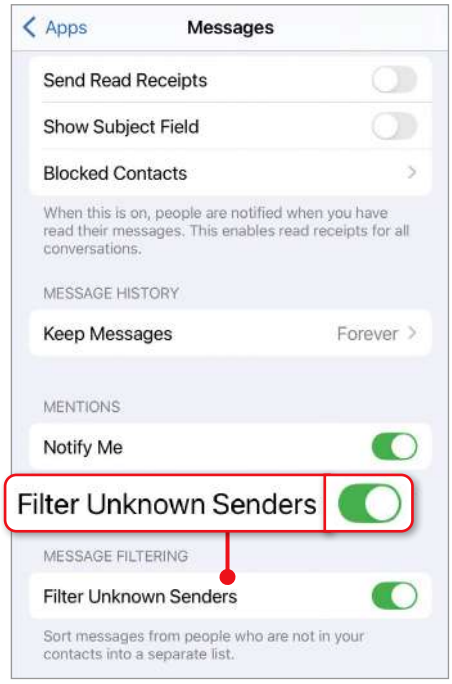
Trend Micro ScamCheck is free to try for 30 days, then costs just £1.99 a month or £19.99 a year.

Scam Detection is activated automatically when you switch on spam protection. It only analyses conversations with numbers that aren't in your contacts list, so won't spy on your private chats. See www.snipca.com/54584 for more information.

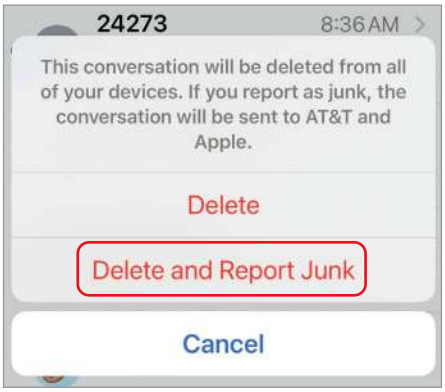
Block spam messages on your iPhone

Apple's Messages app lets you prevent unknown senders from texting you directly on your iPhone or iPad. Instead, their messages are filtered to an Unknown Senders folder, where you can review them and either add their numbers to your contacts, block or ignore them. For your safety, you can't open links in any texts sent to this folder.

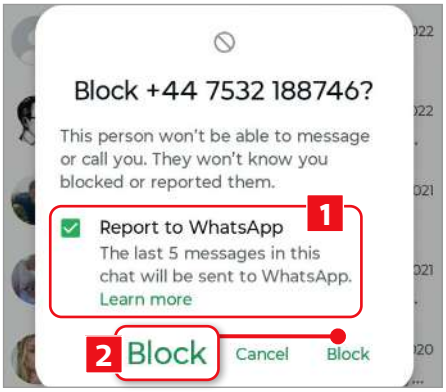
To set this up, open the Settings app and choose Apps then Messages. Swipe down to Message Filtering and switch on Filter Unknown Senders (see screenshot below). You can access the folder from the Messages app by tapping Filters in the top-left corner of the conversation list and choosing Unknown Senders.


Apps
Messages
Send Read Receipts
Show Subject Field
Blocked Contacts
When this is on, people are notified when you have read their messages. This enables read receipts for all conversations.
MESSAGE HISTORY
Keep Messages
Forever
MENTIONS
Notify Me
Filter Unknown Senders
MESSAGE FILTERING
Filter Unknown Senders
Sort messages from people who are not in your contacts into a separate list.

Set up Apple Messages to filter messages from unknown senders


24273
8:36 AM
This conversation will be deleted from all of your devices. If you report as junk, the conversation will be sent to AT&T and Apple.
Delete
Delete and Report Junk
Cancel

Apple lets you delete and report junk, but this doesn't block the sender


Block +44 7532 188746?
This person won't be able to message or call you. They won't know you blocked or reported them.
Report to WhatsApp
The last 5 messages in this chat will be sent to WhatsApp.
Learn more
1
2
Block
Cancel
Block

Block spam in WhatsApp to stop the sender contacting you again

Unlike Google Messages, Apple Messages doesn't detect and block spam and scam messages automatically, whether they're sent by SMS, MMS, RCS or its own iMessage service. However, it does let you block or report them – strangely, you can't do both at once.

To block a nuisance number, tap the name or number at the top of the Messages conversation, long-press Info and select 'Block this Caller'. Annoyingly, you can't block a number without first opening the message.

To delete and report a junk message – which you *can* do without opening it – swipe left on it, tap the bin icon and choose 'Delete and Report Junk' (see screenshot above). Alternatively, if you've already opened a message from an unknown sender, you'll see a Report Junk option at the bottom. Tap this and select 'Delete and Report Junk'.

To boost Apple's meagre protection against unsolicited texts, you can install a third-party app that detects spam, such as TrueCaller (see page 53) or Trend Micro ScamCheck (see box opposite).

Block spam messages and calls in WhatsApp

The popularity of WhatsApp has inevitably led to it being abused by spammers and scammers. You've probably received at least one unsolicited message in the app, whether a simple 'Hi' from a stranger (usually a bot with a profile picture of a young lady) or a targeted phishing scam.

Examples include fake giveaways of free products and vouchers, fake job and investment offers, and particularly nasty scams that pretend to be friends or family members in emergency situations, asking for money to help them. WhatsApp bans accounts that send spam, scams and malware, but with over 2.5 billion users it doesn't catch them all.

To block and report a junk message and prevent the sender from contacting you again, long-press it in your Chats list and choose Block (on iOS) or tap the three- dot menu icon and select Block (on Android). Tick the 'Report to WhatsApp' box (1 in our screenshot above) then tap Block 2. The last five messages in the chat will be sent to WhatsApp, but the sender won't know you've blocked or reported them.

Last year, WhatsApp introduced a feature that blocks messages from unknown accounts when they exceed a certain (unspecified) volume. This stops spammers and scammers repeatedly targeting you with unsolicited messages. To activate the option, go into Settings, tap Privacy, then Advanced, and switch on 'Block unknown account messages'.

You can also block spam calls in WhatsApp. Select 'Privacy' in Settings, tap Calls and turn on 'Silence unknown callers'. You'll still be notified of these calls, but they won't make your phone ring. ca

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Why you must use Command Palette

Microsoft's brilliant PowerToys has just been updated with a superb new tool. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains what Command Palette is, how to get it and how to use it

Regular *Computeractive* readers will already know how much we love PowerToys – Microsoft's ever-expanding suite of free Windows tools. It's one of those rare downloads that would be genuinely worth paying for if it wasn't free. It's endlessly useful and constantly improving.

Now, with the latest major update (version 0.90), PowerToys just got even better, thanks to a tool called Command Palette. It's one of the biggest improvements to Windows in years. Here, we'll show you how to get started with it, walk you through its best features, and share some clever ways you can use it to perform almost any task on your PC – from launching apps and finding files to running commands and making quick calculations.

Why Command Palette is so essential

Part search bar, part Command Prompt, Command Palette is technically a universal launcher. In practice, it's a multi-faceted 'do-anything' box you can use instead of the current Windows Start menu, Run commands, File Explorer and other areas of the operating system.

Command Palette uses extensions that specialise in searching or launching specific types of content. It comes with several extensions built in, which are displayed below the search box whenever you launch the tool. Another bonus is that you can use it almost entirely without resorting to your mouse. You launch it with a keyboard shortcut, then navigate extensions using the up and down keys or just start typing keywords.

It's also a lot more powerful than many of the Windows tools it replaces, providing you with options and shortcuts that you wouldn't get with, say, a standard Start menu search.

How to get it

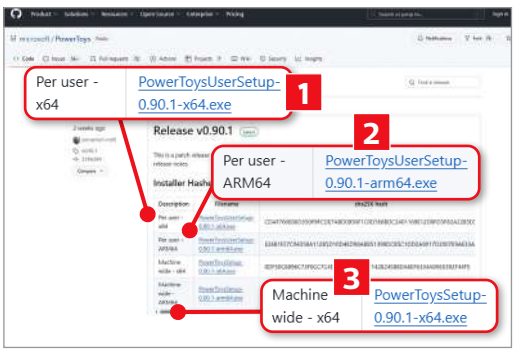
To use Command Palette, you'll need the latest version of PowerToys. If you already have it installed you'll see a prompt to update to the latest version. You can also update it manually by clicking Open Settings, General, then 'Check for updates'.

If you don't already have PowerToys, go to Microsoft's GitHub page at www.snipca.com/54629 and download the latest version for your operating system (v0.90.1 at the time of writing). Most people will need the x64 version of PowerToys (1 in our screenshot below), but if you happen to have a PC with an ARM processor (find out by clicking Start, Settings, System, About and looking under 'System type'), get the ARM64 version instead 2.

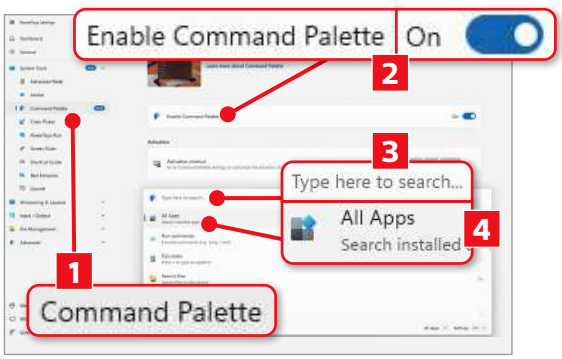
You'll also notice that PowerToys is offered in 'Per user' and 'Machine wide' 3 versions. Choose the former if you'll be the only person using it; choose the latter if you want everyone who signs into your computer to be able to use PowerToys.

Type to find what you want

Launch PowerToys, then click System Tools on the left followed by Command Palette (1 in our screenshot below). Now make sure 'Enable Command Palette' is switched on 2 and press Win+Alt+Space on your keyboard to launch it (though you can change the tool's default keyboard shortcut, as we'll see later). Start typing keywords for the item you want to find 3. As you type, relevant search results – including apps, files, settings or actions that match your keyword – appear below the search box. If the item you want is



Choose the right version of PowerToys based on your processor and who will use it



Switch on Command Palette, then type a keyword to carry out a task

Add and remove Command Palette extensions

The easiest way to add extensions is to choose 'Search for extensions in the Store' in Command Palette's task list. This will launch the Microsoft Store and display a small (but growing) selection of extensions, including converters for currency and time zones.

You can also install extensions via the Windows package manager Winget, though first you may need to install the official App Installer from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/54632). Next, launch Command Palette, select 'Install Command Palette extensions' and press Enter. Highlight the extension you want and press Enter again to install it. Note that when we tried this, some of the available extensions didn't work.

Extensions you've installed will be added to the bottom of the list in Command Palette. To choose which ones are shown and to remove any you don't need, click the Settings cog followed by Extensions on the left. Now click the button next to an extension to turn it on or off.

listed in the results, navigate to it with the up/down keys and press Enter.

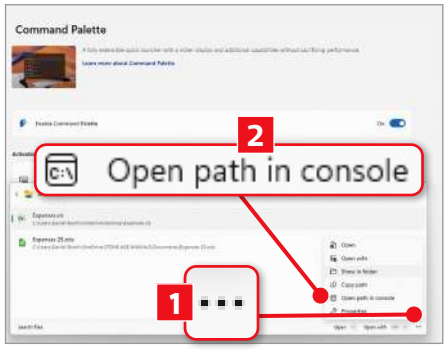
Alternatively, narrow your search to a specific type of content by selecting a Command Palette extension first. For example, to search for an app (rather than a file or command), open Command Palette, highlight the All Apps extension 4 and press Enter. Now start typing keywords and your results will be limited to installed apps.

To go back to the previous screen in Command Palette, press the Esc key. Don't worry if Command Palette disappears when you click outside its window – it's designed to close when you're not using it.

Find files and folders

When searching your PC for files and folders, Command Palette has a few useful tricks up its sleeve. With Command Palette open, press the down-arrow key until 'Search files' is highlighted, then press Enter. Now type a keyword relating to a file you're looking for and results will start appearing below. Navigate to the file you want and press Enter to open it.

Alternatively, press Ctrl+Enter to select an app to open the file with. Or you can press the three-dot menu bottom right (1 in our screenshot below) for more options, including 'Show in folder', 'Copy path' and 'Open path in console' 2. You can also select Properties here to find out more about the file, including its size, extension and more.



When searching for a file click the three-dot menu to see more options

Perform Run commands

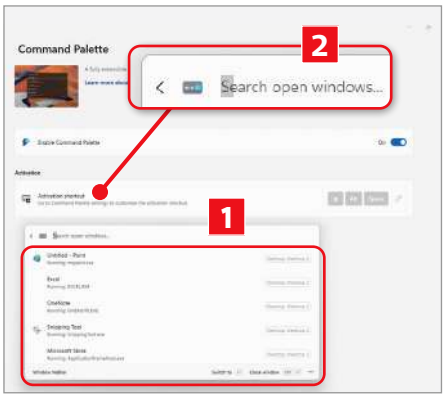
The Run box (press Windows key+R) is useful for launching system tools like Command Prompt, Msconfig, Registry Editor, Group Policy editor and more, or for quickly navigating to hidden folders, such as AppData. Command Palette has a Run extension built in, and you can get to it quickly by pressing Win+Alt+Space then > (right-pointing chevron) and typing your Run command. Pressing Enter will run the command, or you can press Ctrl+Enter to run it as an administrator. Clicking the three dots reveals an additional option to run the command as another user.

Search the web without using Bing and Edge

Infuriatingly, the Start menu's web search is locked to the Bing and Edge browsers. Command Palette finally gives you a way to get around this. Press Win+Alt+Space, then navigate to the 'Search the Web' extension and press Enter (or type ??). Now type your search keywords and press Enter again – your default browser will launch with the search results.

Quickly switch between apps and windows

Another extension – Window Walker – provides you with a handy alternative to Alt+Tabbing your way through your open apps and windows to find the one you want. Launch Command Palette, navigate to 'Switch between open windows' and press Enter. You'll see a list of all the running apps and windows you currently have open (1 in our screenshot above right). You can simply start typing an app's name in the search box to find the one you want 2, or navigate to it in the list and press Enter to switch to it. Pressing Ctrl+Enter will close the window or app you have highlighted.



Use Window Walker to switch quickly between apps and open windows

Best other extensions

Command Palette has its own calculator function: press the = key and start typing your calculations to get instant results. Other extensions include Windows Settings, which lets you search for and launch specific settings (access this quickly by pressing Win+Alt+Space, then $). Windows Services lets you browse, search for and start/stop background system tasks. Windows System Command lets you quickly shut down, restart or lock your PC, or reboot it into the UEFI firmware settings. There are also extensions for searching the registry, launching Command Prompt and more.

Change its keyboard shortcut

Launch Command Palette (by pressing Win+Alt+Space) then click the bottom-left Settings cog. Now click the pen icon to the right of 'Activation key' and press the combination of keys you'd prefer to use – it needs to start with Win, Ctrl, Alt or Shift. Click Save to confirm.

It's worth exploring the other settings here. For example, if you enable 'Single-click activation', clicking extensions, search results, commands and so on with your mouse once has the same effect as navigating to them and pressing Enter on your keyboard. ca

Has your 'new' device been used before?

Did your new hard drive, laptop or phone have a previous owner? **Robert Irvine** explains how to check for giveaway signs it's not as new as the seller claimed

Buying a refurbished device saves you money and helps the environment. But when you purchase a brand new product, you naturally assume it's never been used before and will therefore offer optimum performance.

Sadly, this isn't always the case. Earlier this year, German tech-news site Heise.de reported that more than 250 of its readers had purchased Seagate hard drives that were supposedly new but had, in fact, been used previously – potentially for tens of thousands of hours over up to three years (www.snipca.com/54520).

Further investigation found hundreds of drives were being sold by retailers and in online marketplaces all over the world, including by some official Seagate partners.

Although such occurrences are rare, there's still a risk that a 'new' item you buy online, particularly from a third-party seller, had a previous life. Here, we explain how to check if your devices have been used before, so you can claim a refund from the retailer if that's the case.

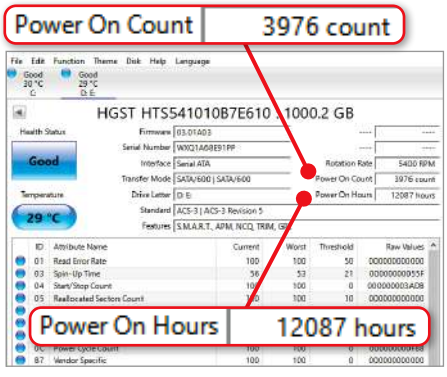
Check if a hard drive has been used before

You can check the health and history of a hard drive through its SMART (Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology) data. This includes details of how many hours the drive has been active for, how many times it's been powered on and if it contains any bad data sectors.

With SSDs, SMART can also tell you the amount of data that's been written to and read from the drive, and the percentage of their projected lifespan that's remaining. On a new hard drive or SSD, you'd expect all usage values to be near zero and the lifespan figure to be 100 per cent.

To check the status of your drives, download the free tool CrystalDiskInfo (www.snipca.com/54521) – to avoid its confusing download page, use this direct link: www.snipca.com/54522. Run the program and it will check your PC's internal and external drives, and provide a summary of the SMART data.

In our screenshot below, you'll see that our hard drive has been powered on 3,976 times for a total of 12,087 hours, which sounds about right for our ageing laptop. On a new drive, you should see figures no higher than double digits, depending on how long you've been using it for.



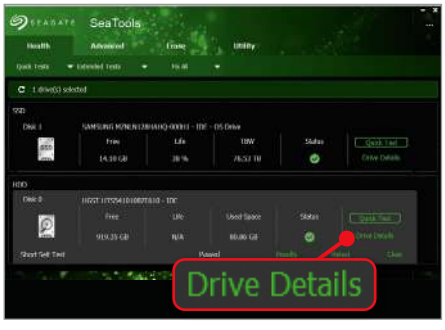
CrystalDiskInfo tells you how many hours your hard drive has been used for

Check a Seagate drive's FARM data

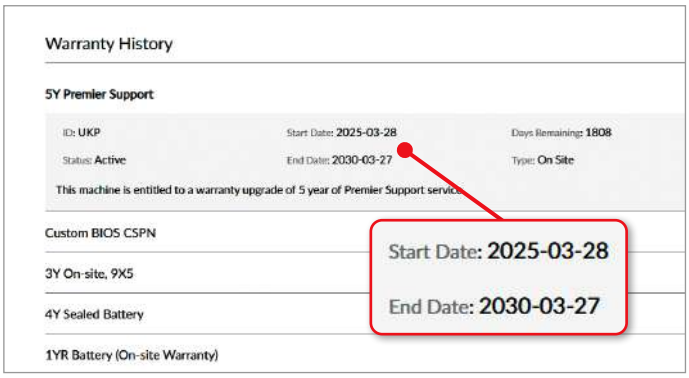
In the case of the fraudulent Seagate hard drives, the SMART statistics had been deliberately reset. This meant their usage data was very close to genuinely new drives, and some buyers only became suspicious when they noticed physical signs of wear on their devices.

To verify whether a drive has been used before, Seagate users are advised to check the FARM (Field Accessible Reliability Metrics) data. Exclusive to Seagate, FARM also provides a 'power on hours' figure, but unlike SMART's value it can't be faked. In legitimate Seagate drives, the FARM and SMART values should be nearly identical, but a significant difference between them suggests the drive has been tampered with to conceal its real age.

There are several third-party tools that reveal FARM data for Seagate drives, but it's easiest to use Seagate's own SeaTools software (www.snipca.com/54524). Click 'Drive Details' (see screenshot below) to



Seagate's SeaTools software provides a drive's true Power On Hours figure



Confirm that your laptop's warranty began when you bought it – not before

view information about your drive, paying particular attention to the Power On Hours figures on the SMART and Power tabs. SeaTools can also provide useful details for non-Seagate drives, but not FARM data.

Check if a laptop has been used before

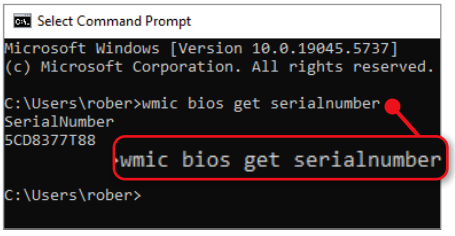
The simplest way to discover if a 'new' laptop has been used before is from its SMART information. You can either run CrystalDiskInfo (as mentioned earlier) or, for a simpler option that focuses solely on read/write data, use DiskCountersView from NirSoft (www.snipca.com/54527).

This free tool tells you how many times data has been read from and written to each of the drives and partitions on your PC, and the respective amounts. Suspiciously high figures indicate the laptop has previously been used.

Other than physical defects (see box right), it's also worth checking a laptop's warranty status to determine if it's had a past life. The warranty begins on the day of purchase, so if the laptop is being resold as 'new' with the original warranty, an earlier start date implies you're not its first owner.

You can find this information using your laptop's serial number. Type cmd in the Windows search box then press Enter to open Command Prompt. Type the command wmic bios get serialnumber (see screenshot below) and press Enter to reveal the serial number.

Now go to the warranty-check section of the manufacturer's website – for example, www.snipca.com/54528 for Lenovo laptops, www.snipca.com/54529 for HP and www.snipca.com/54530 for Dell. Search for the serial number to see when the warranty began and will end (see screenshot above), and if it's been renewed.



Find your laptop's serial number by typing this into Command Prompt

Check if your phone had a previous owner

Buying a supposedly new phone that's been used before not only means you won't get optimum performance and lifespan from the device, but could also suggest it's been stolen. Although new phones are usually sealed in pristine packaging by the manufacturer, this isn't always the case when buying from online marketplaces such as eBay and AliExpress, or if someone gives you a phone as a gift, so it's worth checking if you have doubts.

In our 'Phone theft' feature in Issue 708 (page 60), we recommended making a note of your phone's IMEI number, so you can report it if stolen. This number also lets you discover whether a 'new' device has been blacklisted for being stolen or lost.

To get your phone's IMEI, dial *#06# in the Phone app and note down the 15-digit number. Enter the IMEI number into a free blacklist-check tool such as the one at www.snipca.com/54525. This will search for the number in the global IMEI database, which is maintained by the GSMA (Global System for Mobile Communications Association), and tell you whether the phone is 'clean' or 'blacklisted'.

For even more information about a phone's possible previous life, check its IMEI, make and model at CheckMend (www.snipca.com/54526). Although this site charges for reports and requires you to sign up for a trader account, you get your first report for free without providing payment-card details (you may need to disable your ad blocker).

The report includes information about whether the phone is currently or has ever been blocked (1 in our screenshot above right), could potentially be cloned or counterfeited, and has a previous registered owner 2. As well as providing its results online, CheckMend emails you a copy of the report and lets you download a PDF. Further reports cost £1.99 each. ca

Check your laptop for physical signs of use

A new laptop should be in immaculate condition, so any physical defect is a giveaway sign it's been used before. These may include:

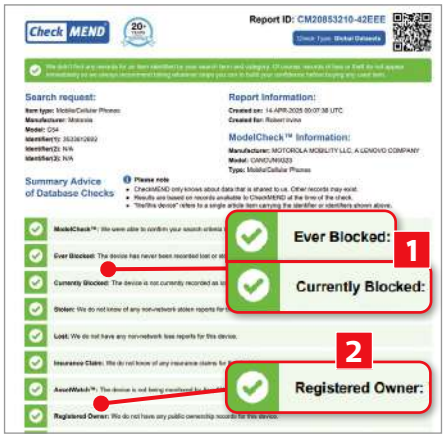
Scratches and scuffs Look closely at the lid, base, edges and corners for any scratches, scuffs or abrasions. A loose or creaky lid hinge also indicates previous use, as does a worn trackpad.

Damaged or missing screws Inspect the screws on the bottom of the laptop. Damaged, missing or mismatched screws indicate the laptop has been tampered with.

Grubby or scratched screen Fingerprints on the screen are an obvious sign of previous use, but check too for tiny scratches. These are easier to spot when the screen is off.

Dust and debris Check around the laptop's keys and especially in its ports for particles of dust and debris the person who cleaned it may have missed.

Unusual noises Listen for suspect noises such as loud fan sounds, clicking or whining, which could indicate wear and tear on internal components.



CheckMend tells you whether your phone has been blocked or owned before

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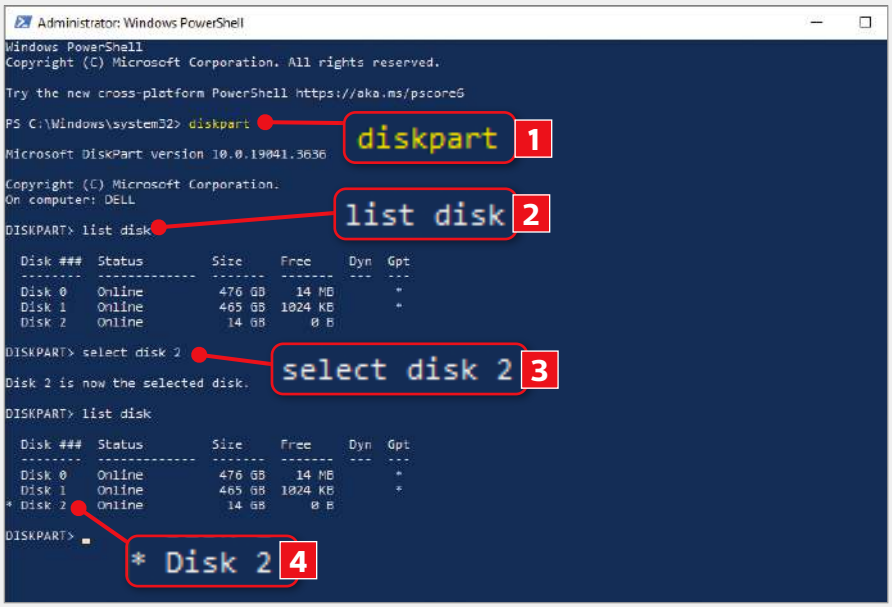
PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

How do I back up my music device?

Q I recently tried to back up my Brennan music device's 500GB hard drive to an external drive, as the company recommends. I plugged a large-capacity external drive into the USB port, but the machine told me it wasn't compatible. When I contacted Brennan's support team, they told me the drives or sticks had to be formatted in FAT32. I checked my USB sticks and drives, and almost all of them were either NTFS or exFAT. The only FAT32 stick I have is too small for the backup.

As a tech amateur, I've no idea how to proceed. Sellers don't seem to state which formats their drives use, and FAT32 appears to be obsolete. I was told to search online and download something. What would you advise?

Richard Latham


Administrator: Windows PowerShell
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.
Try the new cross-platform PowerShell https://aka.ms/pscore6
PS C:\Windows\system32> diskpart
Microsoft DiskPart version 10.0.19041.3636
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation.
On computer: DELL
DISKPART> list disk
Disk ### Status Size Free Dyn Gpt
Disk 0 Online 476 GB 14 MB *
Disk 1 Online 465 GB 1024 KB *
Disk 2 Online 14 GB 0 B
DISKPART> select disk 2
Disk 2 is now the selected disk.
DISKPART> list disk
Disk ### Status Size Free Dyn Gpt
Disk 0 Online 476 GB 14 MB *
Disk 1 Online 465 GB 1024 KB *
* Disk 2 Online 14 GB 0 B
DISKPART>
diskpart 1
list disk 2
select disk 2 3
* Disk 2 4

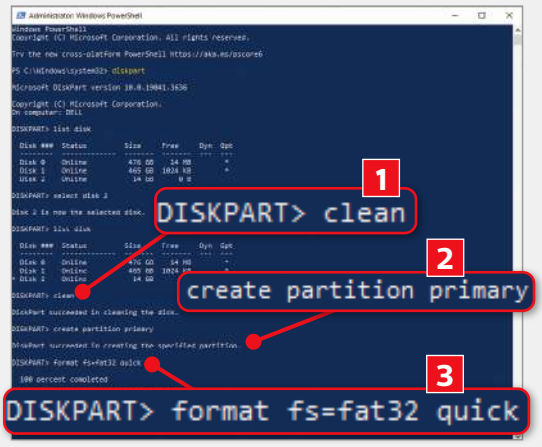
Type these commands and you'll see an asterisk next to the selected drive

A This stuff can certainly be confusing, even for seasoned users, so we'll explain. FAT32 is a very old file system dating back to the 1990s. By today's standards it has very restrictive limits on the maximum size of drive it supports and how big any single file contained on it can be. Windows, for example, supports FAT32 drives of up to 2TB. Frustratingly, Windows simply refuses to apply FAT32 formatting to any drive above 32GB. There is a workaround, however, which we'll get to in a moment.

Today you'll rarely find a new drive pre-formatted as FAT32, because most modern devices have moved on from that standard. So, as you note, new drives tend to be formatted as either exFAT (a more modern version of FAT32) or NTFS, which is what all new versions of Windows use.

However, for various historical and technical reasons, many devices beyond Windows PCs still use FAT32, including your Brennan music device. This means you'll need to format a drive in FAT32 for the Brennan to recognise it. As Windows won't format drives bigger than 32GB as FAT32, the usual advice is to download a tool that will.

However, there is an alternative method that gets the job done quickly without any additional tools, although it does involve using command-line instructions. They're not difficult to execute, but if you make a mistake, you could wipe the wrong drive instantly, so work very carefully, double-checking everything as you go.



Once you've erased the drive and created a partition, you can format it using the Fat32 file system

First, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then click 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. Next, at the command prompt, type diskpart (1 in our screenshot above) and press Enter, then type list disk 2 and press Enter. Now note down the number assigned to your backup drive, which you can identify by its storage capacity, listed under the Size column.

Now type select disk X, replacing X with the relevant number for your backup drive – such as select disk 2 3.

To check you've selected the correct drive, type list disk once again: an asterisk on the left-hand side indicates which drive is selected 4.

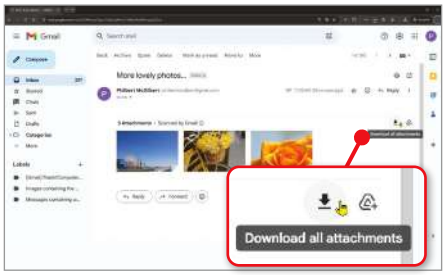
Next, type clean (1 in our screenshot left) and press Enter – this will instantly and irreversibly erase the contents of the drive. Then, type create partition primary 2 and press Enter. Finally, type format fs=fat32 quick 3 and press Enter.

How do I download all the images I get in Gmail?

Q After changing my internet provider recently, I started using Gmail as my primary email service. I run a club, and members send me lots of pictures. However, the images look much too large in Gmail so I can't see them properly without downloading them first. What's more, I have to download each image from a message individually. I've checked, but I can't see any way to download all the images at once or display them at what I'd consider a 'normal' size. I've scoured Settings, but to no avail. Can you help?

Charles McKinnie

A Gmail is frustratingly bad at handling attachments, especially photos. Part of the problem is that your club members are sending photos as inline or 'embedded' images in the body of the message, rather than as attachments. So one solution is to ask them to send images as attachments instead. They would typically do this by clicking the paperclip icon in their email tool, then selecting the photo files rather than dragging and dropping them into the body of their message. That said, Gmail could and should offer better options at the receiving end, which is where your problem arises.



If you receive images as email attachments, click this button to download them all at once

If you can convince members to attach images rather than embed them, Gmail will provide a 'Download all attachments' button (see screenshot above). Click this to download all attached images in a ZIP file.

Otherwise, the only way to view embedded images in Gmail at your preferred size is to use your browser's zoom control. This usually means holding down the Control (Ctrl) button while tapping the '+' (plus) or '–' (minus) keys, or holding down Ctrl while turning your mouse's scroll wheel.

One workaround that might help (though it's not perfect) is to open a Gmail message and save it as HTML. This downloads all the elements of the page, including embedded images. It will save these as JPEGs, giving them labels like 'unnamed.jpg', 'unnamed2.jpg' and so on.

To do this in Chrome, for example, open the menu (three dots, top right) move your cursor to 'Cast, save and share' then click 'Save page as'. Now choose a location on your hard drive before clicking Save. This will create both an HTML page and a folder containing all the page's digital 'assets'. Open this folder to locate the image files.

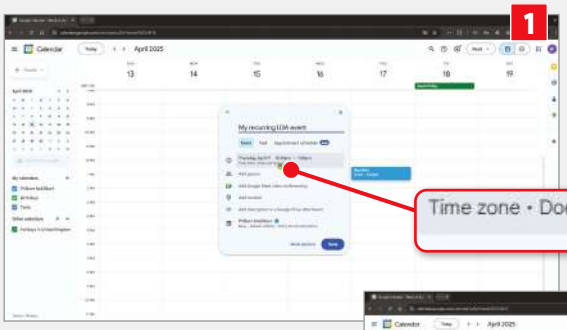
How do I schedule recurring events in Google Calendar?

Q How do I get Google Calendar to enter events automatically on, say, the third Thursday of the month? My U3A (University of the Third Age) group organises events this way, and at the moment I have to enter the dates manually, which is a pain and leads to mistakes. If it's not possible, is there an alternative tool I can use? My colleagues use Apple devices, and they would also like a solution.

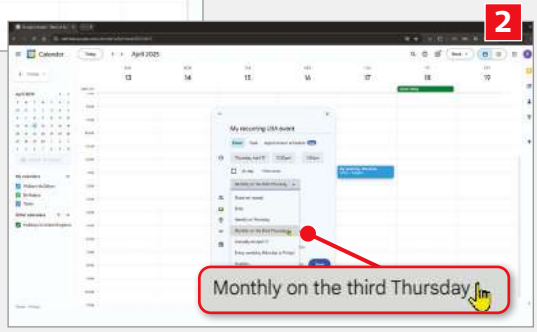
Jim Benn

A You won't need any alternative tools because you can achieve what you want quite easily in Google Calender.

First, click the Create button followed by Event. Set the event's date and time as usual, then look under the schedule and click where it says 'Does not repeat' (see screenshot 1). Next, click to open the dropdown menu that appears, then choose when you want the event to recur, such as 'Monthly on the third Thursday' 2. Tweak any other options you need to include in the Event box, then click Save.



Click this option In Google Calendar to set up a recurring event



Open the dropdown menu and choose the appropriate option from the list that appears

The process is similar for your colleagues with Apple devices. In Apple Calendar on an iPhone or iPad, tap the '+' (plus) symbol to create a new event, then set the date and time before tapping Repeat. Now choose Every Month, say.

You can also set a date when the recurring event ends by tapping End Repeat followed by On Date, then setting the termination date. Finally, add the event by tapping Add.

Why won't my in-car sat-nav update?

Q My car, a Suzuki S-Cross SX4, is 10 years old but has only 13,000 miles on the clock. I've successfully updated its superb in-car sat-nav maps many times, but recently I encountered a problem. When I contacted Suzuki's customer services, they told me updates had stopped in 2020 and that this model won't receive any more. Does this sound right to you?

Rod Cranness

A Sadly, yes. Like other car manufacturers, Suzuki supports its built-in sat-nav systems for a limited period. Sometimes third-party providers continue to offer updates after the cut-off date, but that's not the case here. Garmin, which has been providing updates for your vehicle, stopped doing so in October 2020 (www.snipca.com/54305).

So we're afraid there's no way to update the built-in sat-nav, other than replacing the entire head unit, which is complicated and expensive.

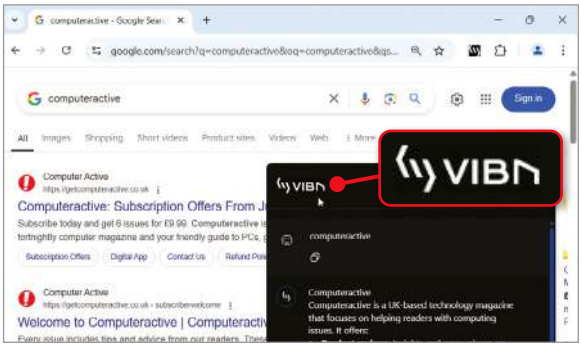
A much cheaper and easier option is to buy a simple bracket, such as the pictured Veligood model (£7 from www.snipca.com/54306), and use Google Maps or a similar mapping app on your phone. This would also eliminate the need to update your maps ever again.

A phone bracket and mapping app is the cheapest fix for a car's outdated sat-nav

What's this black box interrupting my web search?

Q Whenever I search for anything in my web browser, an annoying black box appears in the bottom-right of the window. I have no idea what it is or how to get rid of it. Can you help?

Eric Page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Computeractive is a UK-based technology magazine that focuses on helping readers with computing issues. It offers:

Vibn (also known as Zuvu) is an AI Chrome extension with an uncertain provenance, so we'd recommend removing it

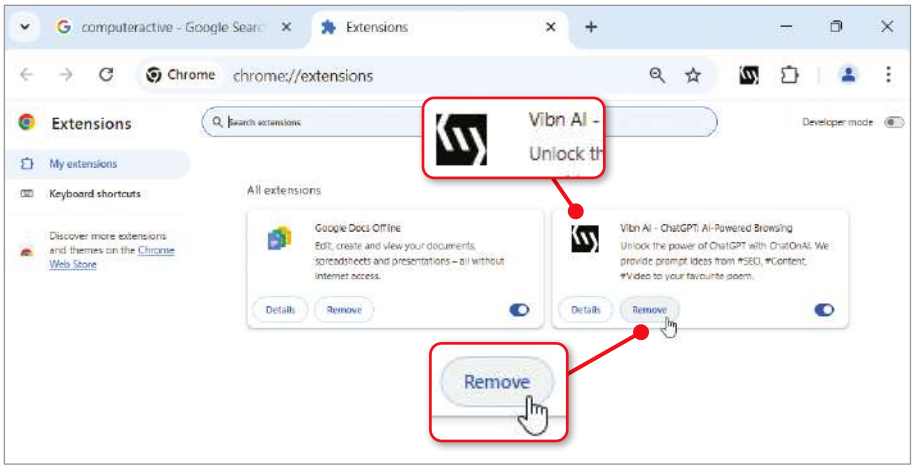
A From the screenshot you sent us (right), we can see that the cause of your problem is a pop-up from a questionable Chrome extension called Vibn. This delivers AI results based on your search terms.

We call it 'questionable' because we struggled to find any information about the extension's developers, who go by the name ChatOnAI. Its website is now offline, and archived versions offer few clues as to who is behind it. The extension itself still works and, at the time of writing, is available to download from the Chrome Web Store. However, its name has changed to Zuvu, although it still appears as Vibn when it pops up.

Everything about Zuvu is similarly unclear.

In short, it's all quite murky. We don't know how it ended up on your computer, but there's a chance it was installed stealthily alongside some other tool you deliberately downloaded to your system. Thankfully, it's easy to remove, and that's what we'd recommend doing.

First, open the Chrome menu (three dots, top right) then move your cursor to Extensions before clicking Manage Extensions. Locate the 'Vibn AI' panel, click the Remove button (see screenshot below), then confirm your decision by clicking Remove again.



Open 'Manage Extensions' in Chrome, then find the Vibn panel and click the Remove button

Q: How does Google know where I parked my car?

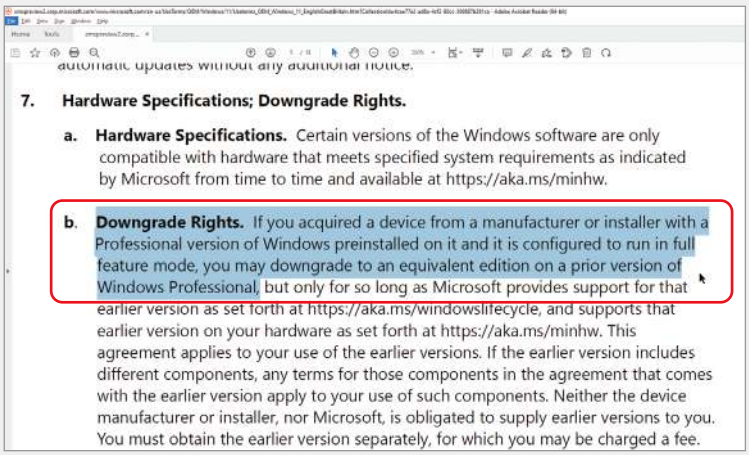
A: Issue 697, page 66 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

Can you downgrade from Windows 11 to 10?

Q In Issue 702's Problems Solved (pages 65 and 68), you helped two readers who had bought PCs with Windows 10 installed but later upgraded them to Windows 11. In both cases you said they would need to buy a new licence to reinstall Windows 10. Why can't they just use the original Windows 10 installation media (or a fresh download) to reinstall Windows 10, then either enter the product key (if they have one) or allow the operating system to activate automatically based on the hardware fingerprint, without needing a new licence?

Rod Currie



7. **Hardware Specifications; Downgrade Rights.**

a. **Hardware Specifications.** Certain versions of the Windows software are only compatible with hardware that meets specified system requirements as indicated by Microsoft from time to time and available at https://aka.ms/minhw.

b. **Downgrade Rights.** If you acquired a device from a manufacturer or installer with a Professional version of Windows preinstalled on it and it is configured to run in full feature mode, you may downgrade to an equivalent edition on a prior version of Windows Professional, but only for so long as Microsoft provides support for that earlier version as set forth at https://aka.ms/windowslifecycle, and supports that earlier version on your hardware as set forth at https://aka.ms/minhw. This agreement applies to your use of the earlier versions. If the earlier version includes different components, any terms for those components in the agreement that comes with the earlier version apply to your use of such components. Neither the device manufacturer or installer, nor Microsoft, is obligated to supply earlier versions to you. You must obtain the earlier version separately, for which you may be charged a fee.

Only Pro versions of Windows can be downgraded without needing a new licence

A As we often say with anything relating to Microsoft's software licensing, it's complicated. When you accept a free upgrade from one version of Windows to another, your original licence is subsumed into the new one. Microsoft gives users 10 days to downgrade their PC if they choose, but after that, the terms of the new licence apply.

A crucial detail in Microsoft's terms for Windows 11 (and 10 for that matter) is that only Professional (Pro) editions include downgrade rights. You can read these terms for yourself, at www.snipca.com/54307 – you'll find the relevant restriction at section 7b (see screenshot).

Most home PC users will have the Home edition of Windows 11, which means that after the initial 10-day cooling-off period, they are not entitled to downgrade their PC from Windows 11 to 10 without buying a new licence.

Now, because of the way Microsoft stores licences digitally in a user's account, it's true that trying to reactivate a reinstalled copy of Windows 10 Home might actually work. However, that doesn't mean the licence is valid. We wouldn't want to recommend readers try something that might fail – or, worse, might succeed initially but fail later when Microsoft deactivates the operating system for not having the appropriate licence.

Will an old laptop impact my new battery?

Q I'm thinking of buying a second-hand laptop that's been fitted with a new battery. I was wondering if the fact that the laptop itself is old would have a negative impact on the battery. In other words, will the battery charge as well as it would in a new laptop and hold its charge as efficiently?

Diana Gamble

A replacement laptop battery may not behave in the same way as the original

A Intuitively, you'd think the laptop being second-hand would have no bearing on the performance of a new battery, but it's not quite that simple. While in theory a brand new battery should charge and hold power just as well in an old laptop as a new one, there are many factors that can affect real-world performance.

We don't know which specific laptop you're thinking of buying, but if the new battery is a third-party replacement rather than the same make and model the manufacturer originally fitted, the laptop's circuitry could interact it with it differently.

If the battery has a different capacity, for example, the laptop might misinterpret its charge level because the battery isn't behaving as expected. Running a full charge-discharge cycle can help calibrate a laptop's calculations, but there's no guarantee.

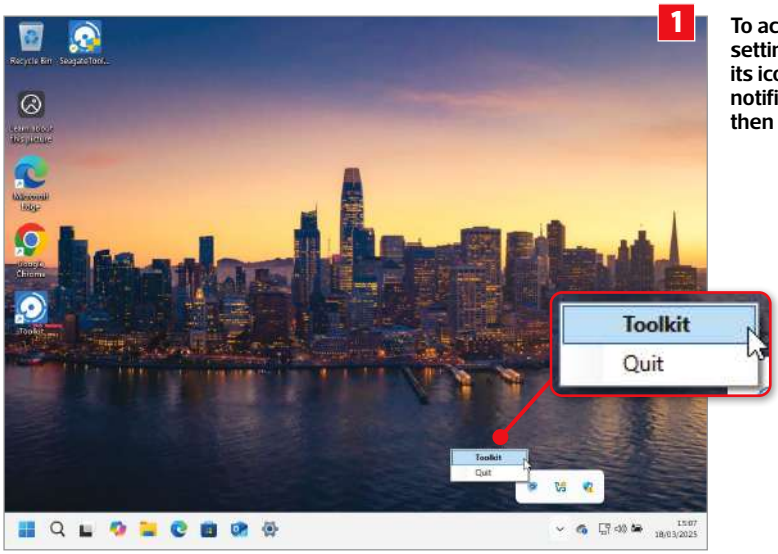
So it's not so much that a second-hand laptop would damage a replacement battery, but that the battery might behave differently to the laptop's original. Whether that's likely to cause problems in everyday use is another matter. However, as you've never used the laptop with its original battery, you have no grounds to compare whether its performance is better or worse, so it's probably not worth worrying about.

What is this strange 'updater' message?

Q Recently, every time I start my PC I receive a message saying that 'updater.exe' wants to run. I don't know what the message refers to because Windows states 'Publisher: unknown'. So when it asks me if I'll allow it to update my PC, I click no.

Can you tell me what it is, where it comes from, and how it got on my computer?

John Parker

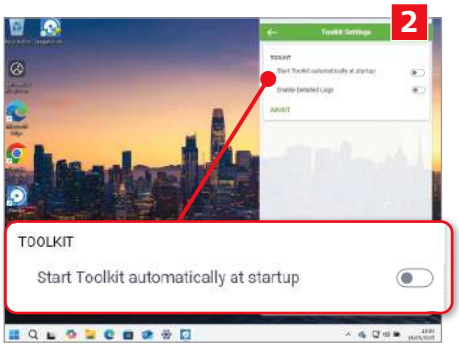


To access Toolkit's settings, click its icon in the notification area then select Toolkit

A You're very wise to be cautious in this situation. From the photo of your screen you sent us, however, we're pretty confident that this message is from Seagate Toolkit, a legitimate tool for computers that have Seagate hard drives. That the publisher is listed as 'Unknown' is very bad form on Seagate's part, but we suspect that's down to lazy programming rather than anything sinister.

In other words, this program is probably safe to run. However, if you never use Seagate Toolkit, you can continue to ignore this message. Alternatively, you can stop the message appearing by telling Seagate Toolkit not to run at startup.

To do this, first right-click the Seagate Tookit icon in the notification area at the far right of the Windows taskbar, then click Tookit (see screenshot 1). Next, in Toolkit, click the three-dots menu icon followed by Settings. Finally, next to 'Start Toolkit automatically at startup', just click to turn the slider off 2.



Turn this slider off to stop Seagate Toolkit starting automatically with Windows

Can I connect two PCs to my old monitor?

Q I have an old monitor that's still in excellent condition and has both VGA and HDMI connectors. Is it possible to connect two PCs to the monitor, one through the VGA socket and the other through HDMI? If so, what problems might I encounter? I understand I can only use one PC at a time, but I'd like to keep them both connected to the monitor.

Mick Miller

You can connect two PCs to a monitor that has both VGA (or D-SUB) and HDMI inputs

A Yes, you can connect a separate PC to each of these sockets. The key question is whether the monitor will let you switch between them. The answer is almost certainly yes, but as we don't know the make and model of your screen, we can't say for sure or provide specific instructions.

However, it's usually a simple matter of using the monitor's controls to switch from one input socket to the other. Sometimes you do this through an on-screen menu, which you navigate using physical controls on the monitor. Look for an option labelled Source or Input. There may also be a physical Input or Source button on the monitor. If so, pressing this should switch between the two inputs. Note that VGA is also known as D-SUB (pictured above).

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

AVIF and older image types

Q I recently found a photo online that I wanted to keep, so I right-clicked to save a copy of it. It saved in a format I'd never seen before – AVIF, with the file extension '.avif'. All my browsers can open this file, as can Google Photos. However, Microsoft Paint and other apps don't recognise it. My online research told me that AVIF stands for AV1 Image File Format, and that it's designed for highly efficient compression and quality. From what I read, it was designed to replace legacy formats such as JPEG and WebP. This is what prompted me to write to you. Is this true? What are the implications? And is there any real difference?

Richard Norwood

A There's an old joke that says the best thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from – and that certainly applies here.

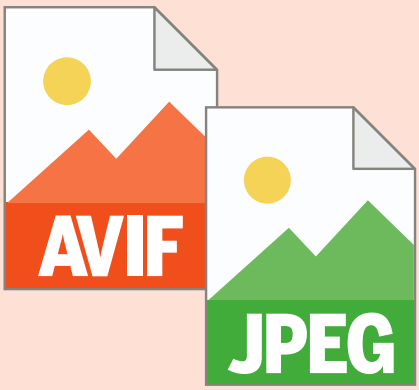
JPEG is a very popular image format, but it's far from perfect. For example, it can lose quality every time you save it, and it doesn't support modern graphical techniques such as transparency or HDR.

One answer to these problems was the High Efficiency Image Format, or HEIF. It was developed by the Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG, www.mpeg.org) to rectify JPEG's numerous shortcomings.

Apple came up with its own version of HEIF called HEIC, where the 'C' stands for Coding. HEIC is now the default image format on iPhones and iPads. Elsewhere, and for similar reasons, Google developed WebP.

This brings us to AVIF. It's a broader, industry-wide effort to settle on a 'next-generation' standard, with support from a consortium of big-name players, including Microsoft, Apple and Google. This organisation calls itself the Alliance for Open Media (AOMedia, https://aomedia.org).

AVIF is essentially the same as HEIF, HEIC and WebP, but slightly better. If things go the way AOMedia hopes, we'll all be using AVIF before long.



This is certainly a possibility, because technically AVIF is far superior to JPEG and numerous other image formats, so we can expect more and more tools to support it. However, users fed up with having to deal with yet another standard may just stick with JPEG, as they have done for decades.

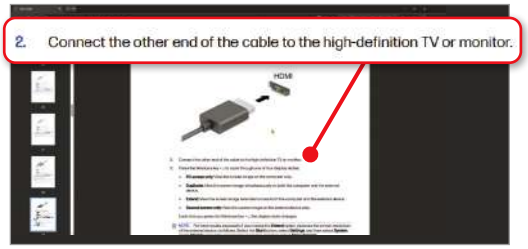
Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can I use my all-in-one as a screen for a new PC?

Q I was interested to read your response to Peter Brown's question in Issue 705 (page 65) about using his Dell OptiPex 5250 all-in-one PC's monitor as a screen for a new mini PC. My HP-b257NA all-in-one PC works perfectly well for my modest needs, but it's not compatible with Windows 11. Something like the Chuwi UBox mini PC you reviewed in the same issue (page 22) could be ideal. My HP PC has one HDMI port and several USB ports, one of which I believe is USB-C. Would I be able to follow Peter's example and use its screen as a monitor for this mini PC?

Chris Parker

A As a reminder for other readers, while Dell's documentation wasn't specific about whether every model of Peter's PC included an HDMI input, in his case it was a possibility. However, HP's manual for the b257NA (at www.snipca.com/54309) is explicit: its HDMI port is only for outputting to external devices (see screenshot).



HP says the HDMI port on Peter's PC is for output only, so he can't use the screen with a second PC

Your machine's USB-C socket also supports the Thunderbolt protocol, which in theory can handle video inputs. However, we're afraid that in this case, too, the HP documentation is clear that your all-in-one's Thunderbolt port is for output only, not input, so you can't connect an external PC that way.

As we said to Peter, if your HP PC has the Pro edition of Windows installed, you could in theory run apps on a new PC and display them on the HP's screen using Remote Desktop. However, Remote Desktop is really a troubleshooting tool, so this isn't a sensible everyday solution.

As you say your HP computer is otherwise working well for you, why not stick with Windows 10 for now? You'd need to pay for extended support when Microsoft makes that available in October, but at an estimated cost of £30 for the first year (www.snipca.com/54308), it would be a lot cheaper than buying a new Windows 11 PC and monitor.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 21 May

- Why are my videos playing so fast?
- How do I wipe my old sat-nav?
- Do I need authenticator apps? ...And many more

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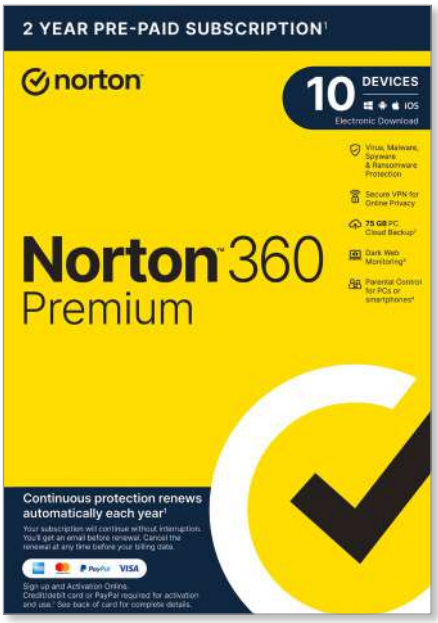

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Why can't I reinstall classic Outlook?

Q I can't reinstall the classic version of Outlook, despite following Microsoft's instructions (www.snipca.com/54211) as described in Issue 706 (page 6). The first download did nothing. The second showed the message 'Mantenha-se online enquanto a sua aplicacao e tranferida'. What am I doing wrong?

John Harris

A As we noted in Issue 708's Reader Support, the installer for Microsoft's classic Outlook is confusing, whether you download it or opt to 'Install from Store'. One quirk of the Microsoft Store version is that some elements of the installer are in Portuguese. A rough translation of the message you're seeing is "stay online while your application is installed. The process will complete shortly."

Microsoft knows about the problem and is presumably working to fix it. But we can confirm that the installation itself is fine. When you launch Outlook from the 'Outlook (classic)' link in your Start menu, the program itself runs in English.

Try installing it from the Microsoft Store link again. This time, ignore any Portuguese messages and wait for the lengthy process to complete. You'll eventually see a message saying 'Está tudo pronto!', which means 'Everything is ready', (1 in our screenshot below) – click 'Fechar' (Close 2).

Ignore Outlook's Portuguese messages – just wait for it to install, then click 'Fechar' (Close)

You may find that Outlook appears a little unfamiliar when you first run it, but don't worry. If you close then relaunch Outlook after setting up your accounts, it reverts to a more familiar look.

Will I lose my broadband and landline when copper is axed?

Q I was interested to see Thinkbroadband's interactive map showing when addresses will get fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) broadband (Issue 704, page 7, www.snipca.com/53798). It confirmed that Openreach has no plans to install FTTP to my address within the next three years. This is backed up by Openreach's postcode checker (www.snipca.com/54488), which states FTTP isn't available at my address. When I checked further, it stated that Openreach has no plans to provide FTTP to my home.

Does this mean that when the copper network is switched off in January 2027, I'll lose my broadband and landline connections, and the telephone number I've had for 39 years?

Peter Gingell

With this setting on, Microsoft Authenticator will keep your 2FA accounts backed up

A It's important to remember that the rollout of FTTP and the switch from copper lines to Digital Voice are two distinct – though related – projects. With Digital Voice, BT is replacing the old public switched telephone network (PSTN) with a system where voice calls are made digitally over your broadband connection.

FTTP rollout is happening on an entirely separate schedule. Openreach is currently aiming to deliver FTTP to 25 million homes and businesses by 2026. But, as you've already discovered, many premises still won't have FTTP by January 2027.

The good news is that customers who live in an area not served by FTTP will continue to receive broadband over a fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) connection, even after the 2027 deadline. What's more, Digital Voice works whether you have an FTTP connection or not, so you'll keep your landline, too.

In most cases you can keep your landline number. The only exception is if you change providers. If so, tell your new provider you want to port your number to your new account before you switch.

Can you transfer 2FA content to a new phone?

Q I was interested in your reply to Tim Boddington's question about two-factor authorisation (2FA) in Issue 706 (page 71). On two occasions I've had to buy a new phone to replace a faulty one. As both phones had stopped working, I wouldn't have been able to transfer their 2FA content to the new device as your advice suggests. What could I have done in that situation? I've been tempted to install the Microsoft Authenticator app (www.snipca.com/54489), but now I think it may not be a good idea.

J Zarach

A As we mentioned in Issue 706, the best authenticator apps let you back up your 2FA accounts to the cloud. In Microsoft Authenticator, for example, tap the three horizontal lines, then select Settings and make sure iCloud/Cloud Backup is turned on (see screenshot above left). Once enabled, backups happen automatically. Do this before your phone develops a fault and you'll be able to restore your 2FA accounts to your next (working) phone.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

2FA Two-factor authentication. A system that uses two different means to identify the user. For example, a code sent to your phone in addition to a password.

2K A screen with 2048x1080 pixels.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

Accelerometer A sensor that detects movement. Used in smartphones to decide whether or not to display a portrait or landscape screen, control games or even work as a spirit level.

Add-in Microsoft's name for tools that can be added to Office software.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

AppData A Windows folder that holds data and settings for programs.

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add virtual elements.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Bridge relay A server that helps users connect to the Tor network, bypassing censorship and online blocks.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time. In Windows this is called Command Prompt.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool. Also used to classify Windows 11 PCs with a neural processing unit (NPU) that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Dolby Vision Dolby's HDR (High Dynamic Range) screen technology.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual-band router A Wi-Fi router that operates on two bands: 2.4 and 5GHz.

E Ink Electrophoretic ink. A special type of ink used to display content in electronic devices.

exFAT Extended File Allocation Table. Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives, and still used for some portable drives.

Favicon A small icon for a website, usually appearing in the address and bookmark bars of a web browser.

Firewall A piece of software or hardware that prevents unauthorised access to a computer over a network.

Firmware Basic software stored on hardware, such as a processor, to control its operation.

Frame rate The number of still images, or frames, shown per second to create a moving image.

FTTC Fibre-to-the-cabinet. A broadband technology that uses fibre-optic cable between a phone exchange and street cabinets before transferring to the normal telephone wires.

FTTP Fibre-to-the premises. Fibre broadband that goes straight to the doorstep. Faster than FTTC.

Gorilla glass Scratch-resistant glass that's used to protect the screens of tablets and phones.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

H.264 A type of MPEG4 video that is used on Blu-ray discs and recorded by many cameras and camcorders.

H.265 The successor to Advanced Video Coding (AVC). It offers the same level of picture quality as AVC, but with better compression.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR Camera technology that takes a rapid burst of photos, then combines them into one.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IMEI Integrated Mobile Equipment Identity. A unique number used to identify each mobile phone.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

ISBN International Standard Book Number. A 10- or 13-digit code used to identify books.

JPEG A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

Large language model A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Layers Image-editing programs let users create multiple layers. Think of these like layers of glass stacked on top of the canvas, which can be drawn on, re-ordered or hidden.

LiDAR Light Detection and Ranging. A remote-sensing method that uses laser pulses to measure distances.

Macro camera Lets you take sharp, detailed, close-up photos of small objects.

Magnetometer An instrument that measures magnetic forces, especially the earth's magnetism.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

MMS Multimedia Messaging. A system for sending images and sounds between mobile phones without using email.

MVNO Mobile virtual network operator. A mobile provider that piggybacks on another network rather than its own.

Noise cancellation Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound specifically designed to cancel the first.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

OCR Optical character recognition. The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition rather than a password.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Product key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. Used for data storage while a PC is switched on.

RCS Rich Communication Services. A method of sending text messages over phones with more features than SMS, such as photos and videos.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

Rich Text A file format used to transfer files between different types of word-processing programs.

SMART Self-Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology. PC-testing technology developed by IBM.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a computer.

TIF Tagged Image File. A standard file format used to store graphics images.

TOPS Trillion operations per second. A measure of a PC's processing power when performing AI tasks.

UEFI Unified Extensible Firmware Interface. A modern replacement for the BIOS, designed to get a PC into a state where it can launch an operating system.

UHD Ultra High Definition.

Ultrawide Offering a field of view that's wider than traditional digital cameras.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VGA Video Graphics Array. An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

VoIP Voice over IP. The routing of voice conversations over the internet, which is cheaper than the telephone network.

WEBP Google's image format designed to create files that are smaller for the same quality, or of higher quality for the same size, than JPEG, PNG and GIF.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Write Save data to a hard drive.

Wi-Fi 5 A standard for wireless – also known as 802.11ac. Allows for much higher speeds than 802.11n.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Broadband Deals

	Provider	Package Name	Monthly Price	Contract Length	Broadband Speed	Reward*	First-year Cost*
1	plusnet	Full Fibre 145	**£26.99** £29.99 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	**145Mbps** avg. speed	**£50** Gift Card	CHEAPEST **£273.88**
2	NOW BROADBAND	Superfast	**£24.00** Price could change during contract	24 Months	**61Mbps** avg. speed	**N/A**	**£288**
3	BT	Fibre 2	**£28.99** £31.99 from 31st March 2026	24 Months	**74Mbps** avg. speed	**£50** Gift Card	**£297.88**
4	Virgin media	M250	**£29.99** £33.49 from April 2026	18 Months	**264Mbps** avg. speed	**£75** Bill Credit	**£284.88**

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*Reward subject to change. Available as of 23rd April 2025.

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Know How

Armed with a handheld scanner and a yearning to get organised, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Catalogue his book collection

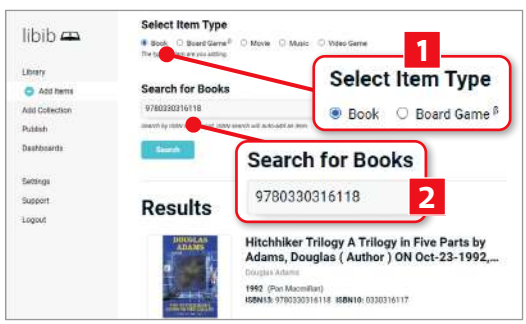
Much as I love my Kindle e-reader, I still feel a strong kinship (as opposed to Kindle-ship) with physical books. However, over the past 10 years, a succession of house moves has reduced my library from hundreds to dozens.

Charity shops have been the main beneficiaries, but I'm frequently frustrated when I go to grab a book from the shelf only to realise I've given it away. With time to spare over the Easter weekend, I resolved to catalogue my remaining book collection, so I can keep track of the titles I own.

I know there are mobile apps that scan ISBN codes, but – inspired by a tip from reader Chris Adam (see Issue 707, page 41) – I thought it would be more fun and less fiddly to use a handheld barcode reader.

I found one on Amazon for the bargain price of £12 (www.snipca.com/54607), from a brand called Netum. While I didn't recognise the name, the reviews and average rating were positive (4.6 of 5), and the company has its own website (www.netum.net).

Unsurprisingly, Netum is based in China, which meant the barcode scanner took a week to arrive, but it was well packaged and came with a manual. Because I'd opted for the cheaper option, it was wired rather than wireless, so I'd need to bring my books to my PC. But this minor inconvenience saved me £24 compared with the Bluetooth model (www.snipca.com/54609), as well as the hassle of charging it before use.



Libib identified Robert's books from their ISBNs

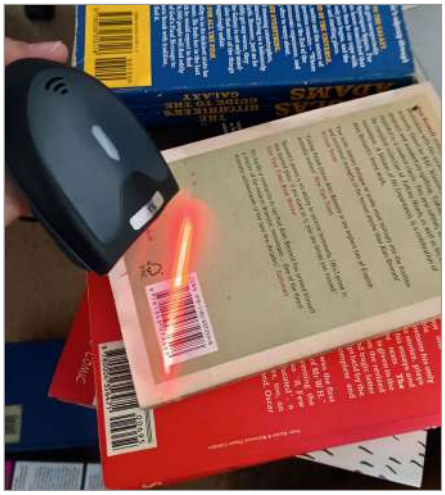
> On my PC, the 13-digit ISBN was automatically inserted in the document I currently had open

I plugged the scanner into a USB port, jumped at the loud beep and grabbed the nearest book. I pressed the blue button on its handle, pointed its red light at the ISBN barcode (pictured right) and it beeped again to confirm the code had been read. On my PC, the 13-digit ISBN was automatically inserted in the document I currently had open.

I now realised I should probably prepare a spreadsheet to enter the codes in, lest I end up with an indecipherable mess of numbers. Or – even better – use dedicated software to catalogue my books and look up information about them online.

One of the Amazon reviews suggested the online tool Libib (www.libib.com), so I signed up for a free Basic account at www.snipca.com/54610. This lets you catalogue up to 5,000 books, DVDs, CDs and games from your personal library.

Once signed into Libib, I clicked Add Items in the left-hand menu, chose Books under Select Collection and selected Book as the item type (1 in our screenshot left). I then clicked the 'Search for Books' box 2 and scanned the ISBN code with my new handheld scanner. Libib instantly recognised the book and added the title, author, publisher, page count and cover to my library. I didn't even need to click Search.



Robert used a handheld barcode reader to scan ISBN codes to his PC

Spurred on by my success, I lugged a pile of books to my PC and scanned their codes too. These were sorted alphabetically in my Libib library, with useful options to add my own reviews, ratings and reading status – such as 'not begun', 'in progress' or 'completed'.

I also tried Libib's free mobile app (www.snipca.com/54613), which worked well, untethered me from my PC to scan books on the shelf and synced its scanned data with my online library. However, it didn't feel as impressive as wielding a dedicated barcode scanner with a fancy red laser beam.

The only downside was the handheld scanner's beep, which was starting to give me a headache. Thankfully, the manual provided a barcode that disabled the tone, and I resumed my ISBN scans in a suitably library-style silence.

Need help cataloguing your book collection? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to sync his clipboard across PCs

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